

Teaching reading for meaning?

A case study of the initial teaching of reading in a mainstream South African school

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Devon Clare Verbeek

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Abstract

Teaching reading for meaning? A case study of the initial teaching of reading in a mainstream South African school

This case study examines the pedagogy of early reading in one mainstream (numerical norm) South African school. Existing research shows that there is reason for grave concern in South Africa regarding the reading achievements of a large proportion of children in the Foundation Phase of schooling. The impact of poor reading achievement in the early years not only remains largely unmitigated throughout schooling, but also affects adult illiteracy rates and academic achievement in institutions of higher learning. The implications for individuals and for society as a whole are profound. However, the acquisition of reading competence in the Foundation Phase at school in South Africa is surprisingly under-researched and has tended to focus on the language of instruction (the “mother tongue debate”) or on broader sociological explanations for the generally poor reading performance of South African school children who do not attend elite schools. Explanations relate to the web of widespread poverty, poor health conditions, and early childhood learning experiences at home and in ECD centres which inadequately prepare children for the demands of schooling, and lack of access to resources such as books in the home. Little of the existing literature directly addresses how pedagogies of early literacy influence the “reading crisis”. This study contributes to understanding poor reading achievement by providing a rare rich description of three Grade 1 literacy classrooms in one South African township school, seeking pedagogical explanations for the continued low reading achievement of South African school children. This interpretative, qualitatively dominant, theory-seeking case study is bounded by category (the pedagogy of teaching reading), space (Grade 1 classrooms in one particular mainstream school in KwaZulu-Natal), time (2006/2007) and theme (How meaning is positioned in the teaching of reading). It captures the understandings and practices of Grade 1 teachers with respect to the initial teaching of reading through an additional language in a typically mainstream school in South Africa. The positioning of reading as a meaning-making activity and the kind of “literate subject” produced by this positioning are foci of investigation and analysis. Data are examined from the perspective of reading theory. Data were gathered from a transect walk through classrooms, extensive classroom observations, teacher interviews, participatory artefact analysis, questionnaires and children’s drawings. Findings were that

these teachers, though fully qualified, have neither coherent understandings of how literacy develops nor appropriate pedagogical knowledge to inform their practice. The dominant instructional practice in these Grade 1 classrooms is whole class recitation of lists of words and of short and mostly unconnected text with restricted meaning and function. Teachers do not consciously help learners to develop the ability to manipulate and play with sounds. Scant attention is paid to the development of concepts about print in these Grade 1 classrooms, in spite of the literacy-poor backgrounds from which most learners come. There is effectively no access to books in the classroom, visits to the school library are irregular and teachers do not read aloud regularly to learners. Learners are not significantly exposed to extended text in the first year of schooling. The almost exclusive use of phonic decoding does not develop learning strategies for word recognition and comprehension, and is inappropriate for proficient reading in English. Most importantly, teachers and learners do not approach reading or writing as a meaning making activity. In the light of international research, it is argued that these practices prevent children from coming to an early understanding of the functions of text and from developing a range of strategies for comprehension. It is argued that this lack of focus on meaning and on ways of constructing meaning in reading are factors contributing to the poor performance of learners in standardised reading tests. Explanations for these pedagogical practices involve a complex interplay of personal experience of reading, outdated initial teacher education and inadequate continuing teacher education. Recommendations are made regarding initial and continuing teacher education for Foundation Phase teachers.

Declarations

I, Devon Clare Verbeek, declare that

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As the candidate's supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Letter names are given in inverted commas: “A”.

Following the conventions adopted by speech and language specialists, sounds are indicated in slanted brackets, such as /b/, /ch/. The International Phonetic Alphabet is not used as this is not a document intended for linguists exclusively.

C or CC	Child or children
C2005	Curriculum 2005 (2000-2002)
CDI	Community Development Index
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CVC	Consonant-vowel-consonant (referring to three letter words such as <i>cat</i> or <i>dog</i> which consist of consonant-vowel-consonant)
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ESL	English Second Language
FET	Further Education and Training
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal, one of the 9 Provinces of South Africa
l/c	Lower case
L1	First language, meaning home language or mother tongue
L2	Second language, meaning additional language
LIEP	Language in Education Policy
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching i.e. Medium of Instruction
NCS	National Curriculum Statement (2006 – present)
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NRP	National Reading Panel
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
pic	Picture
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
S	Student
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

T	Teacher
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNISA	University of South Africa
UOFS	University of Orange Free State (now University of Free State)
UP	University of Pretoria
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Glossary

Additional language	A language other than the home-language/ mother tongue / first language.
Alphabetic principle	The concept that letters represent sounds in written words and that printed letters can be turned into speech (and vice versa).
Analytic phonics	A whole-to-part phonics approach in which the student is taught to break whole words down phonically by paying attention to onset and rime or to the beginning and ending of words.
Automaticity	Reading without conscious effort or attention to decoding.
Background knowledge	Information, experiences and schema possessed by the reader prior to reading.
Basal reader	A kind of book used to teach reading. Words are introduced in a controlled way and repeated in succeeding lessons.
Big Book	Large format book (fiction or non-fiction) designed to read aloud to/with a class. Illustrations and print can be seen from a distance.
Choral reading/chanting	Two or more individuals reading aloud together from the same text.
Cloze	A method of assessment in which a word or words are removed from a text and the reader is required to use the context of the passage to fill in the blank. "Modified cloze tasks" provide multiple choice options from which the appropriate word for each blank can be selected.
Comprehension	Understanding what one is reading.
Concepts about print/ Conventions of Print	The rules or accepted practices regarding the use of print and the use of written language. Concepts about print include: The direction of reading (e.g. reading left to right and top to bottom), words are made of letters, use of spaces between words, use of upper case letters, punctuation.
Connected text	Words that are linked in sentences, phrases, and paragraphs (as opposed to words in a list).
Constructing meaning	A process of making sense of text or building an understanding of what the text is about.
Context clue	Using words or sentences around an unfamiliar word to work out its meaning.
Decoding	Deciphering a written word by sounding it out or using knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences.

Emergent literacy	The skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing. Usually refers to reading behaviours prior to formal schooling.
Ex-model C school	A (usually urban) South African school historically reserved for whites under apartheid and therefore relatively well resourced. In the late 1980s these schools became "state-aided schools", receiving 75% of their budgets via state funding, and supplying the remaining 25% of their operating budgets through user fees from parents and private voluntary donations. Post apartheid, these schools remain well resourced, and continue to use high fees to pay for additional staff and to maintain sports grounds and other facilities.
Explicit teaching	A highly structured instructional technique which usually involves telling students the purpose for learning a particular skill or approach, telling them and demonstrating for them how to do it, and then guiding their own practice of what they have been taught.
Further Education and Training	The post-compulsory band of education provision in South Africa, usually undertaken in the 11 th and 12 th year of schooling.
Fluency	Ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression.
Foundation Phase	The first 4 years of formal schooling in South African schools, encompassing Grades R – 3 (note however that Grade R is not yet compulsory for all children). A distinct curriculum exists for this phase, the overarching intention of which is to develop basic competence in Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills.
Grade R / Grade 0	The Reception year class in South African schooling system. This is not yet compulsory. May be situated in a primary school or in an Early Childhood Development centre. The Curriculum statement provides a curriculum for Grade R as part of the Foundation Phase Curriculum. Grade R teachers do not need to have full teacher qualification and are paid on a different, far lower scale than teachers in "real school."
Grapheme	The written representation of a phoneme (e.g., <i>Sheep</i> has five letters, but three graphemes, namely <i>sh</i> , <i>ee</i> and <i>p</i>).
Graphophonemic	The relationship between the orthography (symbols) and phonology (sounds) of a language.
High frequency words	A small group of words (in English, 300-500) that make up a large percentage of the words in print. They may be regular or irregular words. Often, they are referred to as "sight words" since automatic recognition of these words assists fluent reading.
Invented spelling	A student's attempt to spell a word based on developing knowledge of the spelling system.

Irregular words	Words that do not follow common phonic patterns (e.g., <i>were</i> , <i>was</i> , <i>laugh</i>).
Language experience texts	Texts based on a common experience dictated to the teacher by learners and used in teaching of initial reading.
Letter-sound correspondence	The matching of an oral sound to a corresponding letter or group of letters.
Lexical	Of or relating to the words or vocabulary of a language as distinguished from its grammar and construction.
Literacy (lessons /programme)	(with a capital L) Refers to the section of the curriculum / classroom lessons designated for learning Literacy. The NCS has three learning programmes in the Foundation Phase, namely Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills.
Metacognition	The process of consciously thinking about one's thought processes, learning or reading while actually being engaged in thinking, learning or reading.
Metalinguistic	Language used to describe language and its component parts.
Modelling	Overt demonstration (usually by teacher) of a strategy, skill, or concept that students will be learning.
Onset and Rime	The initial consonant sound (or sounds) that come before the vowel in a syllable. For example, the onset of <i>cat</i> is <i>c</i> . The remainder of the word— <i>at</i> —is called a rime.
Orthography	The written letters or symbols of a language.
Phoneme	The smallest unit of speech that distinguishes one utterance from another (e.g. <i>pat</i> and <i>fat</i> are distinguished by the initial phoneme).
Phonemic awareness	The understanding that sounds in spoken language work together to make words. It involves the ability to notice, think about, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. A subset of phonological awareness.
Phonics	An instructional approach emphasizing letter-sound relationships and generalised principles that describe these relationships.
Phonological awareness	An umbrella term used to refer to one's sensitivity to any aspect of phonological structure in language. It encompasses awareness of individual words in sentences, syllables, and onset-rime segments, as well as awareness of individual phonemes (this aspect is specifically called phonemic awareness).
Phonology	The study of the sound system of a language and the analysis and classification of its phonemes.
Pseudoword	A pronounceable string of letters which has no meaning; also called invented words, nonsense words, or made-up words. (e.g. <i>hease</i> , <i>slibe</i> and <i>quing</i>).

Reading Corner	An area of the classroom set aside for finding and reading books. Typically the corner contains a collection of trade books (classroom library), and some cushions or a carpet for the reader's comfort.
Rebus sentence	Sentence in which one or more words are replaced by pictures. The reader "reads" the picture in place of the word, or writes the word in place of the picture.
Schema	The web of prior knowledge and experience that readers bring to the text.
Sight words	Any words that are recognised automatically. May be phonetically regular or irregular.
Sound(ing) out	Using phonics to figure out words.
Syllable	A segment of a word that contains one vowel sound. The vowel may or may not be preceded and/or followed by a consonant.
Syntax	Grammar. The pattern or structure of word order in sentences, clauses and phrases.
Synthetic phonics	A part-to-whole phonics approach in which the student learns the sounds represented by letters and letter combinations, blends these sounds to pronounce words, and finally identifies which phonic generalisations apply.
Systematic instruction	A carefully planned sequence for instruction, building on previously taught information, from simple to complex.
Trade book	A book intended for general reading that is not a textbook.
Word attack strategies	Strategies used to figure out or decode unfamiliar words.
Word families	Groups of words that have a common rime. For example, the <i>an</i> word family contains the words <i>fan</i> , <i>pan</i> , <i>ran</i> , <i>plan</i> , <i>man</i> , and so on. Also known as phonograms.
Word Wall	An area of the classroom (such as a bulletin board) on which a collection of words are displayed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa's commitment to the international Millennium Development Goals and the six Education for All goals underscores a conviction that increased access to quality education has positive effects on both livelihoods and national growth and development. In the post-1994 period, education policy in South Africa has focused on issues of inclusion, equity and redress. It must be acknowledged that much has been achieved: the entrenchment of education as a right; the integration of 17 racially defined education departments into a single national education department and the passing of the South African Schools Act which defines the education system as single, non-racial and equitable; the allocation of a substantial proportion of the national budget to education; legislation regarding compulsory education; a new and subsequently revised curriculum emphasizing learner-centeredness; the establishment of a qualifications framework; and some improvements in matric results. At the same time there are abiding problems of educational maladministration; infrastructural shortages and poor physical conditions in schools; the scourge of HIV; various race issues; high pupil: teacher ratios; and few reading materials. But among the list of problems experienced, "**Quality** has proved to be [South African education's] Achilles heel" (Soudien, 2007, p. 187, emphasis added).

In this thesis I focus on one crucial and fundamental factor contributing to this crisis in quality in schooling: the kind of foundations in reading that learners develop in school. Exactly what constitutes "sound foundations" is a contested issue with respect to reading, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, but research around the world indicates that the first three years of schooling are absolutely critical in developing and establishing the attitudes, knowledge and skills which will enable learners to learn from reading in later years and to communicate their ideas and learning in cohesive, coherent and comprehensible texts. It is clear that reading and writing are fundamental skills upon which schooling, lifelong education and full participation in life are based. International research indicates that readers who under-perform in the early years of schooling are likely to continue to under-perform academically throughout their lives (see for example, Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 2004).

Literacy is a complex and multidimensional meaning-making process, but in general school students in mainstream South African schools are not helped sufficiently to appreciate this depth and multidimensionality from an early age. They therefore come to understand and to use literacy in particular, restricted, ways which tend to lock them out of the loop of academic success, economic and social development and the achievement of equity.

This work focuses specifically on the role of the teacher in setting up such conceptualisations of literacy in the first grade at school. Strong research around the world suggests that the role of the teacher is of great importance in relation to students' literacy performance: "Knowledgeable teachers are the key" (Weaver, 1994, p. 4). What teachers do is influenced by a multitude of factors such as their training; pedagogic content knowledge; experience; availability of resources; and policy context at macro and school level. This is a case study of what teachers do when they teach literacy in one particular school's Grade 1 classrooms.

1.2 RATIONALE

Existing research (see for example Macdonald, 1990; South Africa. National Department of Education, 2005; Moloi & Strauss, 2005; Mothibeli, 2005; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007) shows that there is reason for grave concern in South Africa regarding the reading achievements of a large proportion of children in the Foundation Phase of schooling. The impact of poor reading achievement in the early years not only remains largely unmitigated throughout schooling, but also affects adult illiteracy rates and academic achievement in institutions of higher learning. The implications for individuals and for society as a whole are profound. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

This research focuses on a typical "mainstream" school, to use the term coined by Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007) in their report on *Schools that Work*. Mainstream schools are the "numeric norm" (Christie et al., 2007, p. 100) in the country, situated somewhere between the elite and the extremely poor, populated largely by black students and teachers, with limited physical resources (including books), and in which the language of teaching and learning is not the home language of either most of the teachers or of most of the learners, but English. Such schools are typical of peri-urban township areas such as the location of the school in this study. Christie et al. argue that, under the challenging socio-economic circumstances in

which such schools operate, “it is **exceptional schools** that are able to perform well – to ‘simply do the work of ordinary schools’ with principals, teachers and learners focused on a task which they feel competent to achieve” (Christie et al., 2007, pp. 102, original emphasis).

The acquisition of reading competence in the Foundation Phase at schools in South Africa is surprisingly under-researched and has tended to focus on the language of instruction (the “mother tongue” debate) or on broader sociological explanations for the generally poor reading performance of South African school children who do not attend elite schools (see Fleisch, 2008). Explanations relate to the web of widespread poverty, poor health conditions, and early childhood learning experiences at home and in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres which inadequately prepare children for the demands of schooling, and lack of access to resources such as books in the home. Little of this literature directly addresses how pedagogies of early literacy influence the “reading crisis”. Bloch (1996, 2002), whose focus is primarily on “biliteracy” (becoming literate in two languages) and Hoadley (2008), who offers a Bernsteinian analysis of the structure of pedagogy in schools serving and reproducing different social class interests, have contributed important facets of understanding of the role of reading pedagogy in early primary school, but much remains to be investigated in this regard. This study attempts to contribute to understanding poor reading achievement by providing a rare rich description of three literacy classrooms in one mainstream South African school, seeking pedagogical explanations for the continued low reading achievement of South African school children.

The pedagogy of teaching early reading has been highly contested in the developed world, as Chapter 2 will show, but has not been a major focus of either scholarship or political debate in South Africa. Elsewhere, the debates have been fundamentally related to different philosophies of what reading is and what it involves, in particular the nature of reading as a meaning-making activity. The National Curriculum Statement (called, at the time of this study, the Revised National Curriculum Statement)¹ sets out a broadly “balanced” approach to teaching reading. While the pedagogy of reading teaching has not been a major focus of debate in South Africa, recent reports (Abadzi, 2004, 2006; Reeves et al., 2008) have argued that children from literacy- and economically-poor backgrounds are best served by explicit

¹ The name of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was changed in 2007 to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), which remains in operation at the time of writing. The content of the curriculum

teaching of phonics at school. Large-scale studies, including comparative studies, should be carried out before such arguments are translated into practice. While the present research does not contribute on this scale, it does provide a rich description of pedagogical practice relating to the teaching of reading in the early years at school, and shows that in this case phonics is in fact the current focus of reading teaching.

I think this research and dissertation have the potential to make three main contributions to the field of study of the teaching of beginning reading. Firstly, the research simply provides rich detail about what actually happens in the Grade 1 reading classrooms in this case. As Chapter 3 shows, there is extremely little research in South Africa which addresses this question, and such information is key to developing strategies to resolve the hugely evident reading problems in the country.

Secondly, the research provides an opportunity to consider theories about acquisition of reading in the context of the unique situation in South Africa where whole classes of learners are acquiring basic vocabulary in an unfamiliar additional language at the same time as learning about print using that language.

Thirdly, the research provides an opportunity to consider the implications of current classroom practice for teacher professional development. This could pose important challenges to teacher training institutions such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the government Departments of Education in South Africa.

1.3 A PRELIMINARY STUDY

The seed for this dissertation was planted in 2004 when I spent time observing Grade 1 Literacy² classes in 12 schools in the Pietermaritzburg and Richmond areas in KwaZulu-Natal and talking to the teachers in these classrooms. The purpose of this research was to

² According to the NCS, one of the three “Learning Programmes” for Foundation Phase students is “Literacy”. In this thesis the term “Literacy” classroom /lesson (with a capital L) refers to instruction in this learning programme. The learning programme involves six learning outcomes for both the Home Language and a First Additional Language in relation to all 4 modes of language, but my particular interest throughout is in the development of reading literacy.

inform the development of a teacher development programme for Foundation Phase teachers. These schools had historically fallen under the administration of various apartheid-era education structures, but had, since 1994, been administered by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. Some classes were taught in English, some in isiZulu and two in both English and isiZulu. My intention at that stage was simply to observe how reading was taught in these classrooms.

I was struck by the fact that the literacy teaching practices I observed were generally similar, no matter what the history of the schools, suggesting that teachers had similar theoretical and practical understandings of the reading process. I saw evidence of books being used for reading instruction in only two classrooms, and saw writing happening in only one other classroom. In all the rest of the schools, literacy was being taught through the decoding of sounds and syllables with the emphasis on isolated words written on a chalkboard or flipchart paper, and with little or no attention to communication of meaning. My dominant impression was of whole classes chanting syllables together.

Discussions with the teachers I observed in the Richmond area also highlighted very different expectations for learners in Grade 1 literacy. For example, in one farm school (which apparently achieves good results in the long term), the teacher expected to spend the whole year teaching the letters of the alphabet and blending of sounds into words, but did not expect learners to actually read sentences or longer text until Grade 2. In contrast, in another farm school where the teacher had been trained by the non-governmental organisation, READ, the expectation was that Grade 1 learners would read twenty-two 16-page readers or story books in the course of the school year. In even starker contrast, Grade 1 children in an ex-model C school which was part of the preliminary study were expected to read between 50 and 100 such books in the year.

I was taken aback. I knew that apartheid education had fundamentally failed learners but I had, perhaps naively, expected to see greater transformation in schools 10 years into our democracy. I had hoped to be witnessing children engaged in real literacy experiences, working with real texts, exploring the myriad functions of literacy, experiencing the wonders of stories and story books, focusing on making meaning, talking, discussing, listening to each other, collaborating with one another, creating, having fun. In this series of observations, there appeared to be a gaping discrepancy between classroom practice in local schools and

what I understood research to be saying about effective reading instruction. In addition, there appeared to be a discrepancy between classroom practice and the National Curriculum Statement regarding the teaching of Literacy in Grade 1. Although the teachers in this small sample affirmed that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education had advised them to use a variety of “other methods” for teaching literacy besides “phonics”, they argued that these methods are “not applicable to us” (Personal communication, Head of Department for Foundation Phase, School in Richmond area, May 2004). However, my own understanding was, following the International Reading Association, that

There is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of the children in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children they teach. (International Reading Association, 1999)

As I observed literacy classrooms in action, I was quickly able to see the unequal nature of print environments available to learners in the schools in this preliminary study. The issue here was not only access to reading materials, but also the richness of the print environments of the communities, schools and Grade 1 classrooms. I could also see the effects of different and unequal teacher training and the management of the schools as a whole. From these observations, it became clear that Professor Jonathan Jansen’s (2005) formula of improving educational quality by managing “teachers, text-books and time” would clearly produce results. However, like Soudien (2007), I sensed that the puzzle of performance in South African schools goes beyond this, as indicated by the fact that neighbouring Southern African countries have managed to achieve greater quality despite the same constraints. Therefore I set out to explore the role which pedagogy might play in Foundation Phase Literacy classrooms in the present study.

The present study deepened the preliminary study by focusing in detail on what was happening in one of the schools in the preliminary study. The case I chose to investigate in the present study was a school with which I already had an ongoing relationship. In the months prior to commencing this research I had been involved in organising a large, multi-dimensional teacher development project which included both teachers and children from this particular school, a component of which involved me in teaching and researching aspects of the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase of schooling (see Verbeek, 2006; Farrar, 2006; Grant, 2008). After the present study was completed I maintained an involvement with

the school for another four years, reading stories on a weekly basis to the children who were in Grade 1 at the time of this study until they left the school having completed Grade 4.

1.4 THE HISTORY OF THIS THESIS

This research began life to fulfil the requirements of a Masters degree in Education. Permission was granted in 2008 for it to be upgraded to a Doctoral thesis, with the recommendation that no further data need be collected but that analysis should be deepened. For this reason, the Ethical Clearance Certificate granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the Masters research (see Appendix 1) applied to this research. I originally intended to deepen analysis through the application of three analytical lenses to the data collected, namely the lens of reading theory, Bernsteinian analysis of pedagogy (Bernstein, 1970, 1974, 1975/1977, 1990, 1996 2004) and Pedagogic Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987). However, as this dissertation progressed, it became clear that using such disparate analytical lenses detracted from construction of a coherent argument in this case and that they were anyway not ontologically congruent (for example, Bernstein is essentially a structuralist, whereas through the rest of the thesis I was emphasising teacher agency). The main analytical lens in the final product is therefore theory about reading. The notion of teaching reading as a meaning-making activity emerged as a key organising feature of my analysis. This is the nature of such an interpretative research project – research design and implementation is recursive, reflexive and subject to pragmatic alteration.

1.5 BROAD OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The ultimate purpose of this research is to inform policy and practice in teacher education for teachers of reading in South Africa, and to advance a social justice agenda through investigating what must be done to provide quality reading education in a mainstream school in South Africa. The aims of the research are:

- To capture the understandings and practices of the three Grade 1 teachers in the case with respect to the initial teaching of reading through English as an additional language in a mainstream school in South Africa.

- To construct a rich, reflective, holistic account of the teaching of the reading in the study and to present this account in terms of theories about learning to read.
- To draw from this implications for initial and continuing teacher education.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following primary questions guided the research:

1. How do the Grade 1 teachers in this case teach reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in this practice?
2. What are the stated beliefs of teachers in this case regarding the teaching of reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in their beliefs?
3. How do teachers' beliefs about teaching reading relate to their observed and reported practice?
4. What do the texts displayed in classrooms reveal about the teaching of reading in those classrooms?
5. Can the texts displayed in a classroom be used as an effective way of revealing how teachers teach literacy?
6. What does this case study illuminate for consideration in relation to initial and continuing teacher professional development of early reading teachers?

The penultimate question above relates specifically to an evaluation of the methodology developed in this study to determine in a truncated period of time how teachers teach reading over a whole year. The study was thus intended to make a contribution at both an empirical and at a methodological level.

1.7 DEFINITIONS

As I will clarify in the review of related literature in Chapter 2, the issue of how literacy, and in particular reading, is understood has fundamental bearing on how it is taught and assessed. This has been and continues to be a contested issue over which the field has not yet reached consensus.

In this dissertation the term “literacy” (with a lower-case l) is used quite specifically to refer to reading and writing. While reading and writing are certainly integrated with other language modes (speaking and listening), and reading can happen aloud and be listened to, a narrower definition of literacy as the production and reception of written text is favoured here. As will be clarified further in the Chapter 2, conceptions abound of “multiliteracies” involving, for example, the reading of images, numbers and body-language, but in this dissertation the focus is on the reading and writing of language in its conventionally written form.

While I see reading and writing as complementary and reciprocal processes, this dissertation focuses in particular on reading and learning to read. I see reading as a complex, multidimensional, socio-psycho-cognitive transactional process whereby, in particular social contexts, the reader constructs meaning from text using multiple cues from the text itself, from the context and from the reader’s existing knowledge. Reading happens in different ways for specific purposes in particular contexts, one of which is the school context. The demands on readers in this institutional context frame this research. All this will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The reader is referred to the glossary of terms on page xv for definitions of other more technical terms used in the dissertation.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Relevant literature is reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Chapter 2 considers the literature relating to reading and learning to read in general, tightly interwoven with theoretical perspectives, whereas Chapter 3 focuses on literature pertaining to this in South Africa.

There is a very large field of literature regarding reading and learning to read, dominated by the USA, and reflecting various disciplinary perspectives. The literature review begins by presenting broad paradigmatic views of the reading process and considering their methodological implications (dominant educational practices and dominant instructional materials used). In the process, two chasms of understanding about reading are elucidated: the first chasm to be examined is the so-called “Great Debate” about whether literacy is

essentially about translating graphic symbols into speech with an assumption that meaning will follow, an approach which leads to an emphasis on phonics instruction in learning to read (Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Chall, 1967), or whether literacy is fundamentally a meaning-making activity, an approach which emphasises treating phonics as but one kind of cue used in the process of reading and writing (K. S. Goodman, 2003, first published 1967; F. Smith, 1994, first published 1971). The “balanced” or “integrated” approach, which attempts to bring together these opposing perspectives by arguing that reading proceeds both from the smallest units of language to meaning and from meaning to smaller units, is also presented (Cambourne, 2002; Freppon & Dahl, 1998). The second area of debate is the so-called “Great Divide” in which the view of literacy as an autonomous activity (Ong, 1982) has been challenged by a view of it as socially situated practice (Street, 2003).

My own position in relation to these debates should be made transparent from the start: In my view reading is essentially a meaning-making activity and should be taught as such from the beginning. While the social dimension of literacy is an interesting aspect of study it remains uncontested that school literacy, a particular form of social practice, is about learning to read and to write for the purpose of finding and sharing information throughout life.

Having presented theories about the reading process, Chapter 2 goes on to focus on the theme of this dissertation, teaching reading for meaning. It considers research precedents regarding developing reading comprehension, vocabulary, general knowledge, fluency and other factors which contribute to reading for meaning. While I present the findings of recent large-scale, government-sponsored reviews of the teaching of early reading conducted in the USA (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000, otherwise known as the Report of the National Reading Panel or NRP), England (J. Rose, 2006) and Australia (Australian Government, 2005), I offer a critique of the consensus reached by these reviews and consider various other components of instruction which literature points to as important and which I consider to be of particular relevance to the data which this case has produced. Chapter 2 then considers a number of debates and issues regarding the teaching of beginning reading which informed my analysis of the data in this research. The final section of Chapter 2 then considers how teachers’ personal theories about reading are seen to relate to their practices (de Ford, 1985; Pajares, 1992; Wray, Medwell, Poulson, & Fox, 2002). This section is important to this study as it provides theoretical background and the conclusions of existing

research for a key aspect of the research: the link between theory and practice as evidenced in teachers' declarative knowledge and practice.

Chapter 3 contextualises the study in South Africa and South African research. Having considered evidence of a "reading crisis" in South Africa, I review literature dealing with the learning and teaching of reading in the first 4 years of formal schooling in South Africa, published between 2000 and 2009 in peer-reviewed journals (for example, Condy, 2008; Dixon, Place, & Kholowa, 2008; Hoadley, 2008; Lessing & De Witt, 2002; E. J. Pretorius & Machet, 2004; M. Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). While I do not claim that this review is entirely comprehensive, every effort was made to find and review appropriate journal articles published in journals of educational research. A typology is developed which indicates the theoretical view of reading espoused by each writer, the key questions investigated, the method of investigation, the nature of the sample investigated and conclusions drawn. The extent to which this literature focuses on meaning in the reading process is drawn out. This review reveals large gaps in South African research about this crucial level of schooling.

The curriculum in operation in South Africa at the time of this research is then examined and related to the theoretical perspectives identified in the previous sections, in terms of key concepts, emphasis and guidance provided in terms of methodology. The positioning of attention to meaning in the curriculum and in other relevant policy documents at the time is addressed in this section.

Details of the research design and implementation are presented in Chapter 4. This study could broadly be described as an interpretative, qualitatively dominant case study. Chapter 4 begins with a justification for the research as a case study, bounded by category (the pedagogy of teaching reading), space (Grade 1 classrooms in one particular mainstream school in KwaZulu-Natal), time (2006) and theme (how meaning is positioned in the pedagogy studied). The case (or the unit of analysis) is the teaching of reading in Grade 1 at one particular school. The research paradigm and methodology, are related to the epistemology and ontology of the research. The study is a qualitatively dominant mixed methods investigation, influenced by ethnography and by participatory research. The study is intrinsic, and is designed to develop the case's own "thick description" (i.e. issues, contexts and interpretations). Data was collected in 2006, using participatory techniques, classroom observation, text analysis, interviewing, questionnaires and children's drawings. Details of

research instruments and procedures are given in Chapter 4 and in the appendices. The chapter details ethical issues taken into account in the research and concludes by considering the trustworthiness of the data and the limitations of the research.

A challenge in designing this research was how to uncover how teachers teach reading in this case without being present in the classrooms throughout the year. I anticipated that the pedagogy of teaching reading could be clarified through examination of texts present in the classroom. Thus two of the research questions relate to an evaluation of this aspect of the methodology. Findings and conclusions in this regard can be found in Chapters 5 and 6.

The research findings are presented and analysed in Chapter 5. Findings are presented in terms of the research questions which guided the study, and according to the methods of data collection. However, holistic descriptions are provided in the form of three representative Vignettes of the teaching of reading and through syntheses of the findings. A number of photographs have been included in this chapter to illustrate the texts used in teaching reading as well as examples of children's drawings of their Literacy classrooms. The findings are then analysed with reference to the theories about reading and learning to read reported in Chapter 2. The dissertation concludes in Chapter 6 by drawing conclusions about each research question and considering implications for theory, policy and practice. The Appendices and References follow.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Learning and Teaching Reading

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to illuminate how teachers in this case study teach reading, and in particular, how they situate meaning in their teaching of literacy. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical context for the case study by considering the field of literature regarding reading, learning to read and teachers of reading. The teachers' perspectives and practice can be understood in the context of theories about the reading process, which are the focus of the Section 2.2. Section 2.3 focuses on reading for meaning as a central part of the study, considering aspects of teaching which are regarded in the literature as essential for teaching reading in such a way that values and promotes reading for meaning. Section 2.4 is concerned with literature relating to children learning to read, and section 2.5 is concerned with literature regarding reading teachers, in particular their beliefs and their training.

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON READING

2.2.1 Defining reading

There are very different ideas about what literacy is for and what it can achieve. These ideas are inextricably bound to the way in which literacy is taught. It is impossible to have a neutral literacy method. Methodology is partly a question of techniques and partly a question of ideology. How literacy is taught often, but not always, tells us about how learners are perceived and what literacy is perceived to be for. (Lyster, 1992, p. 144)

Definitions of reading typically correlate with the focus of reading instruction, and are thus important in a consideration of reading or learning to read. Constance Weaver sets out the following nine possible definitions of reading /characterizations of the reading process (Weaver, 1994, p. 9)

1. Reading is about getting meaning from certain combinations of letters. If the learner knows what each letter stands for, he or she can read (see Flesch, 1955).

2. Reading is about the exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units.
3. Reading is about turning the visual stimulus of written language back into speech. The graphic shapes of print represent *speech* and the meaning is in the speech which is represented by the print (e.g. Strickland, 1964).
4. Reading is about turning written representations of *sounds* into the spoken word. The printed word is not directly meaningful, but designates the sound of the spoken word. In order to get the meaning of printed words, the reader must literally or figuratively hear the spoken word that print represents.
5. Reading is a psychological guessing game. It is not about precise perception and identification of letters and words but about efficiently using cues to make appropriate guesses. It involves interaction between thought and language (see Goodman, 1967/2003).
6. Reading is about reconstructing meaning from language represented by graphic symbols, just as listening is the reconstruction of meaning from sound symbols (Smith, Goodman, & Meredith, 1970).
7. Reading involves interpreting signals of light carried by the optic nerve to the visual centres of the brain from the printed page. The brain gives meaning to the graphic symbol (Dechant, 1970).
8. The reader brings to the text his or her past memories, thoughts and experiences and present personality, and together these crystallise into a new experience (Rosenblatt, 1994).
9. Reading is an emotional thing. Real reading involves transporting the reader to a brand new world, singing dancing, flying (Wayman, 1980).

These definitions roughly reflect opposing views of the reading process. The first four definitions in the list above suggest that reading proceeds from the smallest to the largest units, and that the accurate and linear identification of letters, sounds and words are a necessary precursor to understanding the meaning of what is read. This approach is referred to by a range of terms, as indicated in the left hand column in Figure 1 below. The remaining definitions see reading as proceeding in a more holistic way and emphasise meaning-making as the goal and driving force of the reading process. Terms used to refer to this approach are listed in the middle column of Figure 1. A third approach recognises the identification of

word and sub-word elements of text as well as attention to meaning. Terms used to refer to this are found in the right hand column of Figure 1.

Figure 1: Terminology associated with theoretical approaches to reading

Meaning comes after letter and word identification	Reading is a meaning-making activity	Both meaning and letter/word identification are important
Bottom-up Part-whole (part-to-whole) Decoding Word bound approaches Code-oriented Inside-out Phonics oriented Sounding out Whole word Look-and-say	Top-down Whole-part (whole-to-part) Holistic Whole language Meaning-oriented Outside-in	Balanced Integrated Whole-part-whole Dual route Eclectic Interactive

It must be borne in mind that many writers about the process of reading base their work on reading in the English language. With a few notable exceptions, the United States of America has dominated research output about reading since the early 20th Century, as a result of which much of the research and theories about reading relate, often implicitly, to the process of reading in English. In a critique of current reading research and practice, Share argues that the anglocentric research agenda has rendered reading science “insular” and of “limited relevance for a universal science of reading” (Share, 2008, p. 584).

2.2.2 Theories arguing that meaning comes after letter and word recognition

Nature of the reading process

From this perspective, reading is generally seen to consist of the exact, detailed, sequential, perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units (Weaver, 1994, p. 9). Reading is understood as essentially a perceptual process in which readers translate written letters into sounds, which are thought to be interpreted by the brain

as oral language. Once words are pronounced, meaning is presumed to take care of itself. This paradigm is usually associated with the view that reading is a maturational process, commonly known as “reading readiness”. This is discussed in detail in Section 2.4.1 of this chapter. The term “bottom-up” is also used to refer to these models of reading, since they work from the smallest units of print (letters) and build up to words, sentences, paragraphs and whole text. Bottom-up models emphasise decoding, while top-down models emphasise meaning. Selected theories within this paradigm are now briefly described.

Possibly the best known proponent of this paradigm is the best-selling American polemicist, Rudolph Flesch (1955), who unleashed an attack on “progressive education” and in particular on whole word methods of teaching reading, firing up the Cold War American public into thinking that the USA was falling behind Europe because it did not teach phonics in schools. Flesch’s position was “[Teach the child] letter-by-letter and sound-by-sound until he knows it – when he knows it, he knows how to read. “ (Flesch, 1955, p. 121).

Also within this paradigm, research from a structural linguistic perspective explores the link between reading and speaking. Reading is thus seen as a language function. One line of thinking proposes that reading is about turning the visual stimulus of written language back into speech. The graphic shapes of print represent speech and the meaning is in the speech which is represented by the print (Bloomfield, 1942). An alternative structural linguistic view is that reading is about turning written representations of sounds into the spoken word (Fries, 1963). In either event, the printed word is not *directly* meaningful. In order to get the meaning of printed words, the reader must literally or figuratively hear the spoken word that print represents. The phrase “barking at print”, originally coined by Smith (1971/1994), is used by critics of this perspective to refer to the way that this view can have readers saying the words/sounds represented by the text, but not understanding the message at all.

Gough (1972) takes an information-processing approach to reading, describing a linear, additive process whereby letters are visually recognised by their features. This information is transferred to a sound system, where it is held in a working memory until all the letters in the word are processed. All words are held in this memory until they can be processed for meaning and the sentence can be understood.

LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) influential model of reading argues that reading is a two-step process beginning with word recognition and followed by comprehension. However, their model suggests that recognition of words occurs using not only visual cues, but also phonological, semantic and contextual information, and that there are various ways to move from print to meaning, involving visual, phonological and semantic memory, as well as an interaction of visual information and knowledge (note that this implies both "top-down" and "bottom-up" processing, see Samuels, 1994, p. 1136). LaBerge and Samuels introduce two key concepts, "attention" and "automaticity", in an attempt to explain the difficulties that beginning readers experience in understanding what they read. They argue that beginning readers focus their attention on the decoding function, and later switch their attention to a comprehension function. Beginning readers cannot carry out both functions at once. For them, reading is a slow, laborious process. Fluent readers, according to the theory, have achieved "automaticity" in word decoding, which enables the reader's attention to comprehension to be freed up by not having to expend conscious energy on recognising letters and words. Automaticity is achieved through repetition and practice. Research using Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the brain while reading (Shaywitz, 2003) appears to support this distinction between fluent and beginning reading, as is discussed in Section 2.4.2 below.

Following Purcell-Gates (1997), I discuss phonemic awareness (see for example Adams, 1990) in relation to the bottom-up paradigm, because although it is seen in current literature as one of the components of an interactive literacy programme (see Section 2.2.5 below), phonemic awareness theory proceeds from the argument that skilled readers recognise and process every letter visually and translate them into sound units for pronouncing and understanding. Phonemic awareness is a subset of the umbrella category of phonological awareness (sensitivity to any aspect of phonological structure in language). These terms are sometimes imprecisely used in the literature. Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in SPOKEN words (see Erhi & Nunes, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000; Wagner & Torgesen, 1987; Wren, 2001).

More than 40 longitudinal studies and 30 experimental studies of the relationship between reading ability and phonemic awareness have been conducted since 1970, but no single study conclusively establishes that explicit, isolated phonemic awareness training enhances reading or spelling acquisition (Castles & Coltheart, 2004). Castles and Coltheart distinguish between proximal and distal causes of reading ability. Phonological awareness is a distal cause

because it is part of oral language not part of the reading system. They also distinguish between phonemic awareness as a process and as a task arguing that the acquisition of reading skills changes the way a reader performs the reading task, but does not change the level of phonological awareness itself. Thirdly, they argue that the relationship between phonological and phonemic awareness and reading ability is affected by the complexity of the orthography of the language concerned. There does not appear to be published research relating this theory to the Zulu language, the first language of the students in this study, but the regular nature of sounds in isiZulu and the agglutinative nature of its orthography may well influence the ease with which learners can develop phonological and phonemic awareness.

Unlike meaning-oriented theories which are discussed in the next Section, “word-bound” theories focus on word recognition and sounding-out and do not consider a whole range of other factors as important. Examples of these factors are grammar; the influence of context; the role of background knowledge; readers’ and writer’s prior experiences; affective dimensions of reading; the role of text features such as the content, cohesion and organization; or some of the expected outcomes of literacy learning e.g. the functions that literacy encounters serve.

Implications for teaching reading

In general, this paradigm focuses on isolated skills to achieve accurate and automatic letter and word recognition. This is seen as crucial before comprehension can occur. Early knowledge about the names of letters of the alphabet is seen as the key to later reading success (Adams, 1990, p. 61, found that it was “one of the best predictors of first-grade reading ability”). Pedagogical practice for beginning readers therefore focuses on learning letter names, then sounds, then syllable blending to ensure that students master the code (Pearson, 2000, p. 2). This is essentially synthetic phonics instruction (synthetic meaning building up). Pronunciation, fluency and eloquence are the goals of instruction for more advanced learners. As automaticity is achieved, increasing focus is placed on comprehension. Typically, reading aloud to the teacher is required to demonstrate skill in reading accuracy.

The above goals are to be achieved through presenting, drilling, practicing and testing of discrete items such as letter-sound correspondence, phonemic awareness and elocution (in the South African context, teachers typically refer to this as “pronunciation”), in a sequenced skills-based curriculum. The practice of repeated reading is common. The teacher’s role is seen as providing drill and practice, while the learner is seen as a receiver of knowledge and a doer of drills.

Various code-oriented teaching approaches can be identified. Firstly, “Basal reading programmes” were common in the mid 20th century. These consisted of a series of readers purporting to take into account the interests and developmental capabilities of children by limiting sentence length and difficulty and controlling vocabulary by letter-sound correlation and frequency of use. One of the major impacts of Jeanne Chall’s work, *First Grade Studies* (Chall, 1967), was on the nature of basal readers. Chall heavily criticised the dominant basal readers, as a result of which they began to have more interesting content and characters, to introduce more challenging vocabulary and to include more phonics. The two key messages of Chall’s work were that “just about any alternative” was better than using the basal readers common at that time and that early attention should be paid to letters and sounds (Pearson, 2000, pp. 8-9).

A second group of bottom-up approaches was influenced by linguistic issues. Bloomfield’s approach was to focus on teaching regularly-spelled words and word groups (Bloomfield, 1942), whereas Fries stressed the habitual learning of common word patterns and contrasting spellings (e.g. can-cane; rat-rate; fat-fate) (Fries, 1963). In classrooms in South Africa today the teaching of “word families” (words with common rimes) has its roots in these linguistic approaches.

A third (and not very successful) series of bottom-up instructional innovations saw the development of various new orthographies called Initial Teaching Alphabets in English.

Fourth, the “Mastery Learning Movement” which emphasised breaking complex processes into their subcomponents and teaching each of these separately (Pearson, 2000, p. 10), led to the development of a range of single-component and criterion referenced skills tests. These were used to produce curriculum embedded “skills management systems” which enabled the

teacher to use basal readers and skills-based worksheets to assess the component skills of phonics, comprehension, vocabulary and study skills.

Fifth, the “look-and-say” method (which relies on memorizing words on the basis of their overall shape and involving analytic phonics) is included in the bottom-up paradigm (Vacca et al. 2003, p.37-38). Although popular wisdom has it pitted against “the phonics method” (treated somewhat without discrimination in the 20th Century, and generally referring to learning to pronounce the sounds “made” by printed letters in a synthetic manner), both are essentially behaviourist and perceptual in nature, arguing for the teaching of isolated skills to automatically recognise words or letters before comprehension can occur.

Current debates about the teaching of phonics have progressed beyond whether phonics should be taught to *how* it should be taught. These issues are explored further in Section 2.4.6.

2.2.3 Meaning-driven theories of reading

Nature of the reading process

In general, theories in this paradigm take meaning as the centre of the reading process. Decoding does not precede comprehension, and reading should not be taught as if it does. For this reason these theories are also referred to as “top-down” theories. Reading is seen as a cyclical rather than linear process, involving the use of visual, perceptual, syntactic and semantic processes which all contribute to comprehension. This paradigm is essentially constructivist, arguing that what is learned cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned, that the purposes or goals that a learner brings to the learning situation are central to what is learned and that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through processes of collaboration, negotiation, evaluation and transformation (Cambourne, 2002, pp. 26-29).

Selected linguistic, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and cognitive theories within this paradigm are now discussed.

Chomsky argues that reading is a linguistic process. In his view language is not comprehended in a linear fashion by adding together the meanings of individual words, and

that, “Normal use of language is not an exercise of any habit or skill” (Chomsky, 1987). Contrary to the previously dominant behavioural view of language acquisition, Chomsky and others argue that language acquisition is innate and that children are “wired” to acquire the language of the community into which they are born. From this perspective, language acquisition is rule governed, and children actively infer and test out these rules. In other words, reading is a constructive process. This approach helps to explain how, for example, readers are able to interpret the influence of stress on meaning in spoken language, or the meaning of homonyms in written language.

Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith are the key psycholinguistic theorists concerned with reading. Goodman (1965/2003) has studied what he calls children’s “miscues” (as opposed to their errors) while reading orally, and uses these miscues to show how readers actively construct meaning. This work has had huge impact on the way the reader’s efforts are valued – errors became seen as generative rather than negative. Goodman (1967/2003) uses the phrase “psycholinguistic guessing game” to explain how readers construct the meaning of text using syntactic, semantic and graphophonic cues. In this view, reading is not about precise perception and identification of letters and words but about efficiently using cues to make appropriate guesses. It involves interaction between thought and language. Readers use graphophonic, syntactic and semantic cues to predict and infer, or guess, where a text is going. The reader selects graphic cues from the text, holds them in short-term memory, then makes tentative decisions about the word, and transfers this to medium term memory. Readers check this against what they know (their schema). If it fits, the meaning is transferred to long term memory; if it does not match the process begins again, using new cues. Goodman claims that this model can be generalised over various populations: “diverse readers respond very similarly to common texts and produce some identical miscues at key points” (1994, p. 1099).

Frank Smith’s main contribution (1971/1994) has been to argue that one learns to read from reading, and the teacher’s role is to help learners to read, not to teach them to read. Reading, according to Smith, is more than seeing. When we read we use four sources of information – orthographic, syntactic, semantic and visual – and the more skilled we are at reading, the less we use visual cues. Rather, skilled readers construct meaning by making informed predictions based on what they already know. Smith uses the phrase “the Literacy Club” to explain how we come to do literacy in the same way as other literate people. Children in the Literacy

Club have opportunities to see what written language can do, they are encouraged and helped to do those things themselves and they are not at risk of exclusion if they make mistakes. They “learn to be like the other members of the club” (Smith, 1971/1994, pp. 217-218).

In the 1970s cognitive psychologists such as Rumelhart (1982) applied schema theory to an understanding of reading comprehension and learning. Schema theory is concerned with how our knowledge is structured and ordered in our memories. We understand new things/ experiences in terms of what we already know or have experienced. In reading, prior knowledge is central. The reader brings to the text his or her past memories, thoughts and experiences and present personality, and together these crystallise into a new experience. This theory focuses teacher’s attention on what learners already know, rather than on what they are not yet able to do or do not yet know.

The cognitive psychology perspective raises the question of whether meaning resides in the text, the writer, the reader, or in interactions between any of these. The transactional view of the reading process, as set out by Rosenblatt (1994), posits that meaning does not reside ready-made in the text, and neither does it reside in the head of the reader. It comes into being through the transaction between the reader and the text, in which process both the reader and the text are transformed in some way (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1063). Rosenblatt famously coined the metaphorical idea of “The Poem” to describe this transacted meaning.

In contrast to the maturational view of how literacy develops, the reading-as-meaning paradigm conceptualises literacy learning as a process which continues throughout life, beginning in early childhood. Experiences with and learning about literacy in the home, community or early childhood education contexts were recognised as important – an approach called Emergent Literacy. This is discussed further in Section 2.4.2.

Sociolinguists such as Halliday (1975), Heath (1983), and Wells (1986) focus on understanding reading and language in a social and cultural context. They use the concept of “context”, which had previously been seen in terms of the words surrounding a word in a text, to refer to the home, community and instructional context of a learner. The social functions of language and reading are highlighted, as are the influence of class, race and gender. The role of preschool, community and family-based experiences is highlighted. Sociolinguists also argue that reading itself is a social process and has particular functions in

particular contexts. One of the few South Americans to make a significant impact on the reading field, Paulo Freire, emphasises that reading involves “reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29ff) as well as reading the word, and proposes a methodology of learning to read which is at once a theory of social transformation in the sense of challenging power relationships and the structure of society, and a conception of education as a tool to bring about such change.

Implications for teaching reading

In essence the “top-down” approaches to reading pedagogy advocate that, since reading is essentially a meaning-making activity, teaching should proceed from whole to part and that the child should first be introduced to whole sentences and paragraphs (in the context of natural and meaningful text), and learn from this about the smaller units of language such as words, letters and sounds. From this perspective it is not necessary for the reader to process every letter or every word. This is also called an “inside-out” process because it begins in the mind of the reader who hypothesises, on the basis of past experience and knowledge of language, about the meaning of the text, and later confirms/denies these hypotheses.

Practically, the linguistic, psycholinguistic and cognitive psychology views of reading place comprehension at centre stage of reading instruction. Learners are taught that reading should always make sense, and accurate reading aloud is de-emphasised. Learners are required to talk about books in book clubs or literature circles rather than to answer traditional factual recall type comprehension questions. Explicit links are made between reading and writing. Writing for genuine purposes is emphasised and children are encouraged to “invent” spellings. Reading instruction is not confined simply to the very early years at school and is integrated increasingly in other curriculum areas.

The 1970s saw the development and increasing dominance of “whole language” (not to be confused with “whole word” or “look-and-say” methodology), which, as Vacca et al. (2003, p.37-38) point out, is a bottom-up approach, and the intensification of conflicts between proponents of this method of teaching and the decoding method. Whole language methodology is child-centred, constructivist, authentic and integrated. The teacher is seen as a facilitator of learning and a skilled adaptor of materials and methods to support individual

learners at a specific time. The learner is seen as an active constructor of meaning who already has knowledge which can be built on.

From this perspective, value is placed on texts using natural language patterns which enable learners to predict words and meanings. Genuine literature, language experience texts, patterned and highly predictable texts are commonly used. Altered or simplified texts are typically avoided for teaching and learning purposes, as these would prevent learners from making use of innate language knowledge and strategies. Classroom libraries of trade books (books which are not designed specifically for instructional purposes) and Big Books (large format books which can be seen and read together by a whole class) are commonly used, as are the materials of real life such as newspapers, menus, instructions and other genres. In response to schema theory, the reader's knowledge and cultural background are taken into account in choosing reading materials.

2.2.4 Interactive (balanced) theories of reading

Nature of the reading process

Towards the end of the 20th Century, the search for THE single model of literacy gave way to an increasing acceptance that the different theories offer different but complementary ways of viewing reading and writing. The resultant understandings are called balanced, or interactive, theories of the reading process. These accept that both letter-sound cues and meaning cues are essential to the reading process. Readers make educated guesses about meaning, based on their prior knowledge and on their purpose for reading, and they also decode letters and words. Rapid and accurate word recognition is necessary for making sense of the text.

Australian cognitive psychologists, exemplified by Max Coltheart (2006) have developed a "Dual Route Model" of the process of reading aloud which fits within this paradigm. The Dual Route Model expands on the concept, also present in Goodman's work, that there is an interaction between meaning, visual word recognition and pronunciation and presents a more nuanced understanding of how words are held in memory. The model proposes that we use two components of the cognitive system for reading. One is a "lexical route" or procedure by which the reader can recognise a printed word and read it aloud by accessing the word, its

pronunciation and/or meaning in the “mental lexicon” (Coltheart, 2006, p. 7). Our mental lexicons, or memory stores of previously seen words (Castles, 2006, p. 50), contain information about the spelling of words and their visual forms (the orthographic lexicon), about the pronunciation of words (the phonological lexicon) and about the meaning of words (the semantic system). Studies of people with various kinds of brain damage indicate that the three components of the lexical system operate independently and two can still function if the third is impaired in some way (see, for example, Coltheart, 2006). But we are also capable of recognising regular words by using a “non-lexical procedure” (Coltheart, 2006, p. 8) which does not consult the mental lexicon. This procedure involves the use of grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules. Regular words (which obey the grapheme-phoneme rules) can be read using either the lexical or the non-lexical procedures, but irregular words can only be read using the lexical procedure which makes use of orthographic, phonological and semantic knowledge.

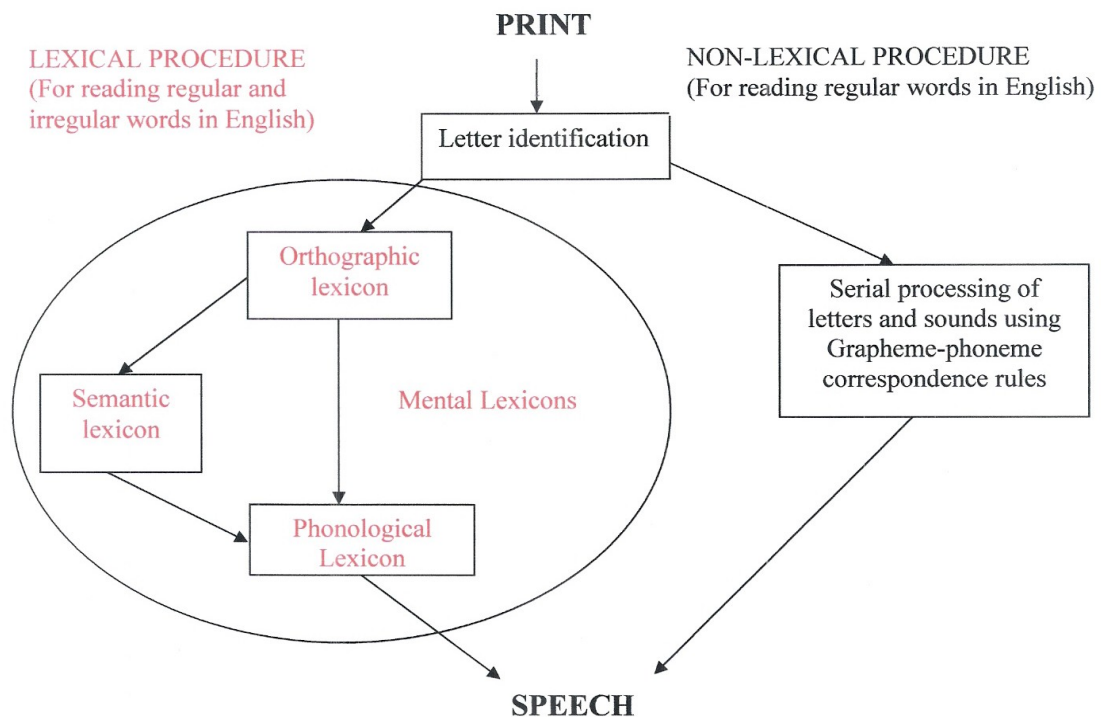
Coltheart represents his model diagrammatically as in Figure 2 below. The left hand side of the diagram represents the lexical, word level, processes and the right hand side shows the non-lexical, sub-word level processes. Note that both processes rely on the initial identification of letters in the printed word and that because the semantic and phonological lexicons serve both the oral and the written language, reading is “heavily dependent on oral language” (Stuart, 2006, p. 21). Neither Coltheart nor other researchers using this model relate it directly to use by English language learners specifically. However, the model would seem to emphasise that for reading in English, which is a highly irregular language, the lack of stored semantic knowledge would be a significant barrier to reading in English as an additional language.

Coltheart argues that all children who have begun to learn to read have all three of the mental lexicons described, although there are quantitative differences in what is stored in these lexicons. Thus learning to read is explained by the model as a “progressive quantitative expansion” of the system rather than as a staged process (Coltheart, 2006).

According to the dual route model, words are “locally represented” in the reading system, i.e. a word corresponds to a single entry in the lexicon, rather than having a unit in the system playing a role in representing many different words. This is in contrast to Goodman’s

explanation. In the non-lexical route of the model, processing happens in series, i.e. letters and sounds are translated in order, one at a time, from left to right. Coltheart cites a literature review to which he contributed which identified eight different aspects of reading aloud which cannot be explained unless serial processing is occurring in the reading system (2006, p. 13).

Figure 2: The dual route model of reading aloud
(Adapted from Coltheart, 2006, p.8 & 9)

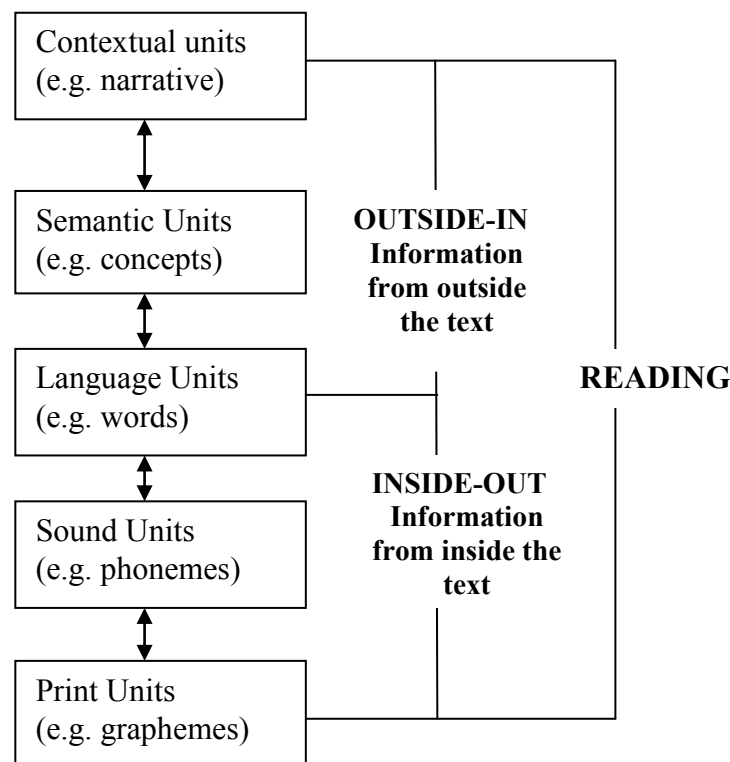


Another model of reading which exemplifies the interactive paradigm is that proposed by Whitehurst and Lonigan (2003). This model derives from the sources of information from which meaning of text is produced and is presented in Figure 3 below because of the clear way in which it represents the fact that “meaningful comprehension of all but the simplest of writing depends on knowledge which cannot be found in the word or sentence itself” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2003, p. 14). This expands on the argument of the socio-psycholinguistic model. According to Whitehurst and Lonigan, literacy involves the use of “two interdependent domains of information”: outside-in information comes from outside of the text but supports the reader’s understanding of print (e.g., conceptual knowledge, story schemas and vocabulary); inside-out information is contained within the printed word and

enables the reader to connect print and sound (e.g. phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, punctuation and cognitive sequencing skills).

Note that Whitehurst and Lonigan's domains are distinct from so-called "top-down" and "bottom-up" processing in that their domains refer to *sources of information* rather than the way text is processed. Thus it is possible for top-down and bottom-up processing to occur within both of the domains they describe.

Figure 3: Whitehurst and Lonigan's domains of literacy
(adapted from Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2002, p.13)



Implications for teaching reading

The preceding section has shown that in the interactionist paradigm reading is understood to involve using both information about sounds and their representations and also contextual and semantic information. At the practical level of teaching reading, however, interaction, or balance, is "one of those elusive concepts that means different things to different people" (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 51). A number of different positions emerge.

- Balance is about both teaching direct, explicit skills and language-rich literature instruction in two separate, parallel strands. Phonics and word knowledge is a *prerequisite* to successful reading (Honig, 2001).
- Balance is about giving reading and writing equal status, about recognising the affective and the cognitive dimensions of literacy, and about giving diverse students similar opportunities to become good readers, as well as being about balancing meaning with a skills emphasis (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 2001).
- Balance is about planning instruction based on children's backgrounds, interests, strengths and needs, which might mean using either top-down or the bottom-up methodologies with different children (Freppon & Dahl, 1998).
- Balance is about integrating the language arts with children's literature (Tomkins in Freppon & Dahl, 1998, p. 243).

One of the important implications of “balanced” instruction, however it is defined, is that good pedagogic practice requires extensive teacher knowledge about literacy. This position is supported by number of large-scale investigations (Adams, 1990; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Chall, 1967; Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; J. Hoffman, 1994). Of particular importance to the present study is the assertion that teachers need a wide pedagogic knowledge base, and need to be able to differentiate instruction. This will be investigated and discussed in later chapters and picked up again in the analysis and discussion of data collected in this study.

In general therefore, the integrated or balanced approach to reading instruction would see skills being taught in the context of authentic reading in a whole-part-whole fashion which emphasises that the purpose of reading is comprehension of meaning.

Recent major studies into the teaching of early reading commissioned by the governments of the USA (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000, otherwise known as the Report of the National Reading Panel or NRP), England (J. Rose, 2006) and Australia (Australian Government, 2005), as well as the school curriculum in South Africa, all support balanced or integrated approaches and offer a blueprint of the essential elements of reading which should be taught. These studies emphasise the following five components of teaching reading:

- Phonemic awareness instruction;
- Phonics instruction;
- Fluency instruction;
- Vocabulary instruction;
- Text comprehension instruction.

While there is no disagreement that these are critical aspects of learning to read, the hegemonic conclusions of these government-sponsored reports in singling out these “Big Five” for attention, have been criticised from many quarters. The NRP report has been criticised for its narrowly focused research review, which not only excluded qualitative studies in favour of experimental research with both an experimental and a control group, but also divided up research studies that it did consider in terms of different reading skills, in effect supporting a skills-based approach to reading (Weaver, 2002, p. 258). NRP panel member Tim Shanahan (2003) lists 20 topics the NRP considered but ultimately did not study. Michael Pressley (2001) and Jim Cunningham (2001) have also noted the narrow list of topics included in the NRP report. Allington suggests five additional “pillars” of reading instruction which are supported by a substantial body of experimental research (2004; 2005), arguing that we ignore these five additional pillars at our own peril. The additional aspects of reading instruction which he identifies for attention are:

1. Providing access to interesting texts, choice and collaboration (all of which have been shown to have greater effect than phonics instruction).
2. Matching readers with appropriate texts (in other words, differentiated instruction is crucial).
3. Recognising that writing and reading have reciprocal positive effects.
4. Balancing whole class teaching with small group and side-by-side instruction.
5. Making expert tutoring available.

2.2.5 Reading as socially situated practice

Nature of the reading process

I discussed the influence of sociolinguists in relation to the top-down paradigm. Another set of theories, often referred to as theories of reading as socially situated practice, also draws

attention to the role of literacy in society, focusing on both the functions and form of the literacy activities of social groups and challenging the conception of literacy as a purely individual process. The social meanings and uses of literacy in different contexts (not only in the school) are of key interest, as is an awareness of power and the nature of knowledge, social class differences in the meanings and uses of literacy in these contexts and the intergenerational maintenance of such differences. The influence of social identity (class, race and gender) both on what the reader brings to the text and on how he or she interacts with the text is of interest. Of particular relevance to the development of literacy in schools has been work which examines the relationship between school literacy and non-school literacy events, particularly in the home context (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1997; Wells, 1986). However, this paradigm offers little regarding the internal nature of the reading process itself.

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) group provides a key example of what Gee (n.d.) calls “the social turn” away from an individual-centred view of literacy towards looking at literacy in terms of social practices and cultural contexts. Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000, pp. 1-15) identify the following six characteristics of an NLS perspective on literacy.

1. Literacy is understood as a set of social practices; these are observable in events which are mediated by texts.
2. Different literacy practices are associated with different domains of life.
3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relations and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
5. Literacy is historically situated.
6. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making as well as formal education and training.

A key contribution of the NLS is the distinction between “autonomous” and “ideological” models of literacy. Traditional (“autonomous”) views of literacy pedagogy are criticised as “a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalised, monolingual, monocultural and rule-governed forms of language” (New London Group, 1996, p. 61). The argument is that this traditional view of language teaching is underpinned by the so-called “literacy thesis” that advanced human cognition and cultural traditions can be attributed to literacy (see for

example Anderson, 1983; Ong, 1982). While non-alphabetic forms of “literacy” are acknowledged in this traditional theoretical perspective, they are regarded as “restricted” forms of literacy which cannot contribute to cognition and cultural development in the same way as alphabetic literacy.

The doyen of the Reading as Socially Situated Practice paradigm, Brian Street, proposed an “ideological model” of literacy in opposition to the autonomous model.

Literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; ... it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being. Literacy, in this sense is always contested, both its meanings and its practices, hence particular versions of it are always ‘ideological’, they are always rooted in a particular world-view and a desire for a view of literacy to dominate and marginalise others. (Street, 2001, p. 7).

The concept of “practice” originates in Scribner and Cole’s highly influential ethnographic study of literacy among the Vai people in Liberia. They describe practice as “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge” and argue that the nature of the literacy practices “will determine the kinds of skills (‘consequences’) associated with literacy” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236). Importantly, Scribner and Cole found that reading, writing and schooling promoted, but were not the only factors which stimulated the development of cognitive skills such as logic, abstraction, memory and communication (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 252).

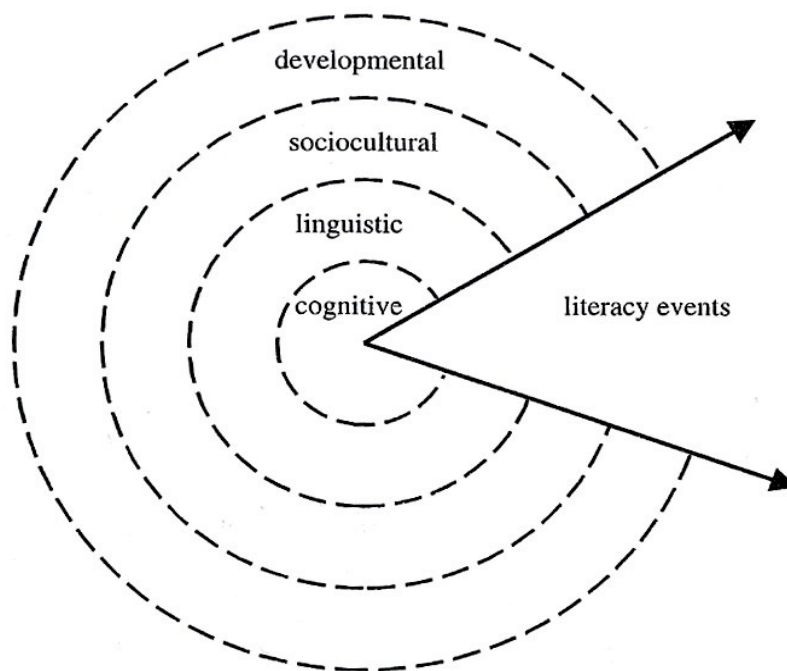
While the NLS perspective strongly valorises out-of-school literacies, one important set of concerns of a description of the social construction of literacy relates to schooled literacy and how this links to home learning experiences. The sociologist of literacy, Cook-Gumperz (2006) argues that the 20th century international emphasis on universal literacy and universal schooling has redefined how literacy is conceptualised. Literacy is no longer a personal goal, it is now a basic human right; it is no longer just a way of storing and transmitting information, it provides the basis for other information technologies to grow; it no longer represents development for people and societies but is seen as the precondition for progress; education and schooling no longer simply promote literacy, schooling is not possible without advanced literacy (Cook-Gumperz, 2006, p. 38). She summarises her position thus:

The purpose of schooling is to transform this commonplace literacy of contemporary society into a formal discipline of literate reasoning that takes the form of a set of technical skills. It is these technical skills that we take to be the subject of literacy tests

and literacy rates. If these technical competences become confounded with normative standards and prescriptive practices based on earlier views of literacy... then confusion over the nature of literacy as a product of schooling results. (Cook-Gumperz, 2006, p. 49)

One model of the literacy process which attempts to show the interconnections between sociocultural dimensions of literacy and cognitive, linguistic, developmental dimensions is provided by Kucer and Silva (2006). Luke and Freebody (1999) propose a similar model (see practical implication section below). Kucer and Silva propose that literacy is a dynamic, multidimensional process. The reader or writer is (1) a code breaker or code maker (this is the linguistic dimension of literacy) (2) a meaning maker (the cognitive dimension) (3) a text user and text critic (sociocultural dimension) and (4) a scientist and construction worker (developmental dimension). Kucer and Silva represent these dimensions of literacy as in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Dimensions of literacy
(Source: Kucer and Silva, 2006, p. 4)



At the centre of the literacy act, according to this model, is the cognitive dimension - exploration, discovery, construction and sharing of meaning (Kucer & Silva, 2006, p. 3), which always involves various mental processes and strategies e.g. predicting, revising, monitoring. This cognitive dimension transcends languages. The linguistic dimension is "the

language vehicle through which meanings are shared" (Kucer & Silva, 2006, p. 4) and involves graphophonic, syntactic and semantic dimensions. Literacy is also a social act and thus has a sociocultural dimension. The model highlights the fact that literacy events are not simply acts of individual meaning-making, but also social acts in which factors such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and cultural experiences are brought to the reading process. A fourth dimension is an ongoing developmental one, concerned with how the reader learns to become a code-breaker/code maker, meaning maker, and text user and critic. Kucer and Silva argue that we utilise knowledge of these dimensions in a "transactive, symbiotic manner....The challenge faced by the individual is to juggle and integrate both the constraints and possibilities offered by each dimension" (Kucer & Silva, 2006, p. 4).

Implications for teaching reading

A few key implications of these theories for the teaching of reading in schools can be identified. First, the classroom should relate to real life. This means that the purposes of literacy in the classroom and the materials used should be authentic.

Another important practical outcome of this paradigm in schools is the “pedagogy of multiliteracies”. Here the term multiliteracies has dual meaning – it refers both to learning to read a variety of print and non-print media and to different cultural practices which impact on literacy for diverse groups in society.

A third implication of the NLS for pedagogy is to favour “critical literacy education” which includes learning to negotiate “a multiplicity of discourses” (New London Group, 1996) in order to produce, reproduce or transform the existing social order.

The “four resources model” of teaching literacy, proposed by Luke and Freebody (1999), is widely used in Australia to provide learners with the opportunity to develop a “family of practices” which are all necessary but not sufficient for literate citizens. These practices are:

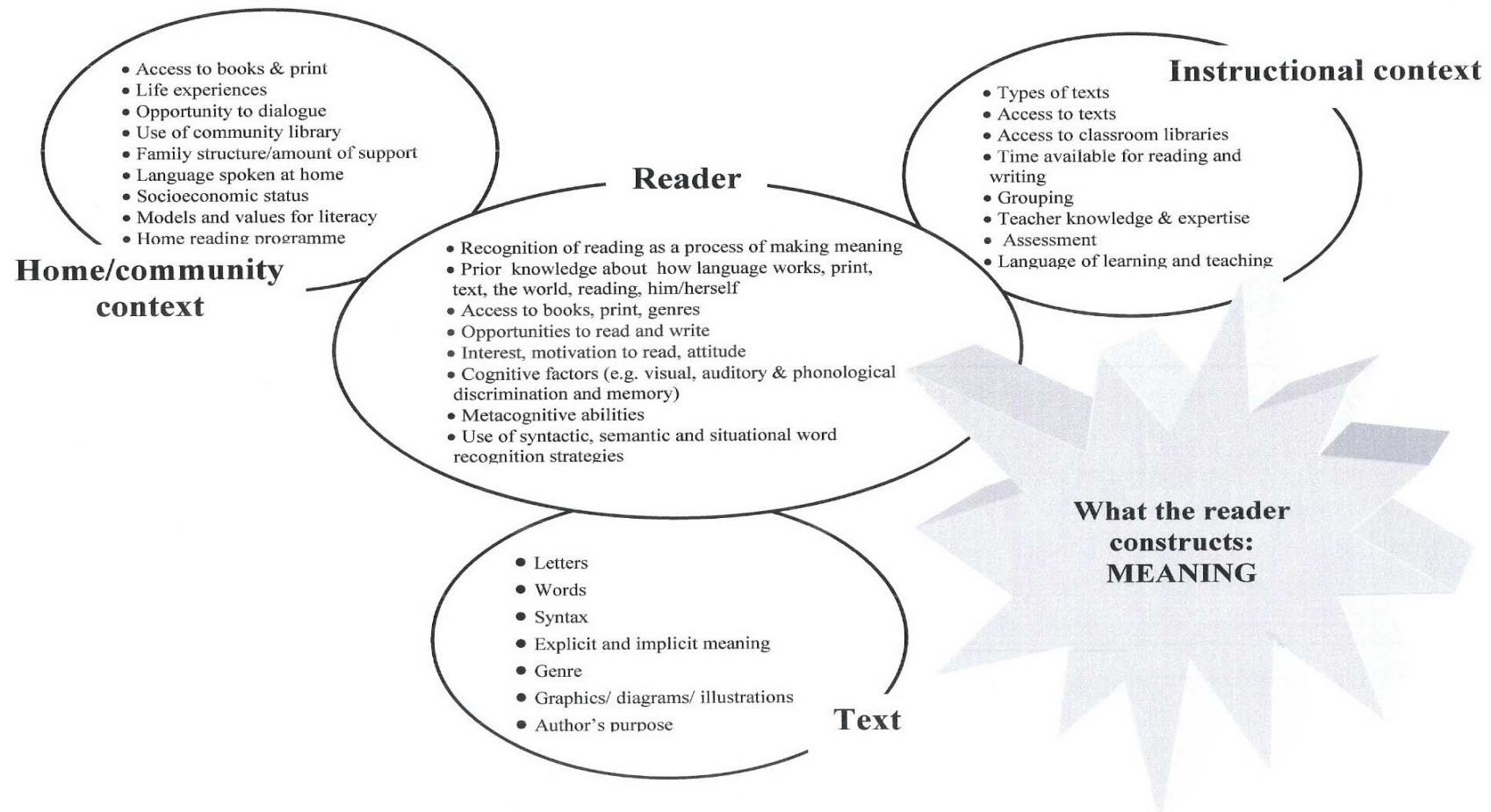
- Code breaker (coding competence);
- Meaning maker (semantic competence);
- Text user (pragmatic competence);
- Text critic (critical competence).

Another practical implication of this paradigm is the focus on teaching genre (Barton, 1994; Martin & Rose, 2005; Street, 1995). Duke and Purcell-Gates argue that genre is one way of thinking about and connecting home and school practices "because research has shown that familiarity and experience with textual forms and features enhance comprehension of printed text" (2003, p. 34).

2.2.6 Synthesis

By way of concluding this section, I present, in Figure 5 , a diagram I have constructed while preparing this literature review to show the factors which are important influences on the reading process. This is a synthesis of the components of the theoretical works which make most sense to me, and provides me with a framework of understanding of reading as an integrated, multidimensional, socio-psychocognitive transactional process.

Figure 5 : Interactive Model of Literacy Learning in Schools
 (Constructed using Snow, 2002; van DeCarr, 2002; Wray & Medwell, 1991)



2.3 TEACHING READING FOR MEANING

The first section of this chapter provided an overview of four theoretical paradigms relating to the reading process. These paradigms are distinguished from one another by the way in which they situate and even understand meaning. While it is uncontested that the ultimate purpose of reading is to “get the meaning” of what is read, there remains considerable controversy over how and when this happens and how pedagogy should be structured to enable the learner to read for meaning, as was discussed in the sections on the implications for teaching reading in relation to the theoretical paradigms. The present study aims to highlight the ways in which reading is taught as a meaning-making process in a particular school. I have chosen to focus now on six aspects of teaching reading which I regard as crucial to learning to read for meaning. It should be noted that there are strong inter-relationships between the aspects of reading for meaning discussed below, and that in reality they are not discrete components.

2.3.1 Comprehension instruction

Traditionally, comprehension has been taken to mean “understanding what is read”, assessed in schools by the ability to accurately recall what was read in order to answer some type of “comprehension questions.” This approach to comprehension is particularly prevalent in relation to approaches to reading which emphasise letter and word recognition as a prerequisite to understanding. An alternative definition of comprehension would be “thinking about and responding to what is read”. “Top-down” and some “integrated” and “social practice” approaches to reading emphasise the text-to-self, text-to-texts and text-to-world connections which the reader can make when reading with understanding (Allington, 2001, p. 90), as well as summarising, synthesising, analysing and evaluating the ideas in the text.

Traditionally also, schools have tended to see the first three years of schooling as focusing on learning to read (in many cases, implying learning word-recognition skills), and thereafter focusing on reading to learn. Consequently, “comprehension” has tended to be seen as a function of the later primary school, and not part of the brief of Foundation Phase classrooms. It is, however, important to focus on comprehension right from the start, as the foundations

for comprehension are laid in the early years (Burns, 2006). An important research finding in the USA has been that, while schools routinely provide comprehension *practice and testing*, comprehension strategies are seldom *taught* explicitly (see, for example, P. M. Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Durkin, 1978-79; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). It is probable that this is also the case in South African classrooms. There is now increasing consensus among researchers and policy-makers that this situation needs to change, including in Foundation Phase classrooms. It is increasingly recognised that demonstrations of (modelling and talking about) comprehension skills from the start of school can be highly effective (Wray, Medwell, Fox, & Poulson, 2000; Wray et al., 2002).

Students who have developed fluent decoding skills often experience a sharp drop in reading comprehension scores when the instructional focus changes from learning to read (Grades 1-3) to using reading as a tool for learning (Grades 4 and up) (Cummins, 2003). This finding is supported by Macdonald in the South African context (Macdonald, 1990). Nation and Angell (2006) consider a number of reasons why poor comprehenders fail to understand text. At the text level, they have difficulties making inferences (Cain, Oakhill, Barnes, & Bryant, 2001), monitoring their comprehension and appreciating story structure (Cragg & Nation, 2006). These findings highlight aspects of reading comprehension that should be taught to children. Secondly, Nation and Angell (2006) note that there is considerable evidence that poor comprehenders exhibit oral language weaknesses in relation to vocabulary and word knowledge (semantics), sentence comprehension and inflection (morphosyntax) and understanding figurative language. However, importantly, poor comprehenders do not always have difficulties with phonological processing and awareness (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2000; Nation & Angell, 2006). In the context of this study, where children are learning to read in an additional language in which they have very limited proficiency, these findings are very important.

The third set of reasons for poor comprehension identified by Nation and Angell relate to poor working memory, but research in this regard has not been able to show whether difficulties with memory cause difficulties with comprehension or vice versa. However, as any learner of a second or additional language will attest, it is harder to hold newly acquired words in a new language in memory than newly acquired words in one's first language.

Again, this points to the significant difficulties faced by children learning to read in an additional language.

Several reviews of research on the development of enhanced comprehension skills (Block & Pressley, 2001; Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992) agree that:

- Reading comprehension can be improved by effective teaching (it is not about intelligence). Comprehension involves active thinking which is improved when comprehension strategies are made visible to the learner through explicit demonstrations.
- Teachers need to stop relying on “comprehension questions” which assess immediate recall of information and neither improve proficiency nor promote independent and effective thinking skills while reading. Again teacher demonstration of useful strategies is important.
- It takes time and repeated practice to learn comprehension strategies. Allington argues that it takes between four and ten weeks of focused instruction to learn to use a strategy (Allington, 2001, p.97).

One productive line of research regarding comprehension has been to identify the characteristics of good comprehenders. Remarkable agreement has been reached in this regard. Pearson et al. (1992) suggest that expert readers are distinguished from novice readers by the use of the following seven comprehension strategies:

1. Activating prior knowledge about the topic and the text organisation e.g. through making predictions.
2. Monitoring comprehension and adjusting strategies according to the text.
3. Repairing comprehension e.g. through re-reading, skipping ahead.
4. Determining important ideas.
5. Synthesising or summarising while reading.
6. Drawing inferences by combining prior knowledge and textual information.
7. Asking questions before, during and after reading to activate prior knowledge, check comprehension, and clarify ideas.

Duke and Pearson (2002) and the National Reading Panel (2000) add to this list using text structure and constructing mental images and visual representations.

There is also a great deal of consensus as to how such comprehension strategies could optimally be taught: explicit teaching, with the teacher describing the strategy and when it should be used, modelling the use of comprehension strategies, thinking aloud about the strategies, providing scaffolded practice (guided reading) and then gradually withdrawing scaffolding until the learner practices the strategy independently. Both Duke and Pearson (2002) and the NRP report (2000) support teaching more than one strategy in one lesson and helping learners to use multiple strategies at the same time.

Cunningham et al. (2002) caution that, while teaching reading comprehension is important, the teacher's key objective should be to get learners to be intrinsically motivated to read and enjoy reading. For this, independent reading practice and being read to by a competent reader are crucial and should not be sacrificed for strategy instruction.

Duke and Pearson (2002, p. 235) have created a checklist for assessing the comprehension environment and instruction in the classroom. This checklist notes the extent of:

- Time students spend reading;
- Clear purpose for reading;
- Availability of different genres in the classroom;
- Opportunities to develop vocabulary and content knowledge through texts, discussion of new ideas and direct instruction;
- Direct instruction in decoding of words;
- Time spent writing texts (emphasis on reading-writing connections);
- Talk-about text in the classroom environment;
- The range of comprehension strategies taught to students and whether they are encouraged to use more than one strategy at a time;
- Explicit description, modelling, collaborative use, guided practice and independent practice of comprehension strategies taught;
- Ongoing assessment of comprehension skills;
- Concern for motivation to engage with literacy;
- Matching of texts to strategies and students.

I shall use this list to analyse data from my case study in Chapter 5.

2.3.2 Vocabulary and background knowledge

Vocabulary carries meaning. Those who learn to read using a language in which they have limited oral vocabulary, such as the children in this case study, struggle to find meaning in the texts they read because oral language (vocabulary, syntax, discourse and phonemic awareness) is absolutely central to literacy achievement (Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006).

A substantial body of research across cultures and countries shows that the socio-economic status of a family is likely to affect the kind of language experiences a young child has, and that for children of low socio-economic status, these language experiences are typically different from the experience of language in formal schooling. Numerous studies show, for example, that children with low socio-economic status are exposed to fewer words and to less analytical discourse about these words than their more privileged counterparts (Hart & Risley, 1995; Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986). These social class related issues are compounded when children study in school using a language other than the one they speak at home, such as in the present study. The oral vocabulary size of children entering Grade 1 predicts their word reading ability at the end of that grade, as well as their comprehension eleven years later (Juel, 2006, p. 412). Juel reports that at the start of Grade 1, the difference in oral vocabulary between linguistically advantaged and linguistically disadvantaged children in America is estimated at 15 000 words (2006, p. 412). In addition there is evidence that lack of vocabulary is an important contributor to school failure (Biemiller, 2006; Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002). Once again, where schooling is conducted in a different language to the home language of children, these issues are compounded.

Acquiring vocabulary is a complex process. A great deal of vocabulary development occurs indirectly, for example through conversations, through being read to, or through independent silent reading. For this reason it is important for teachers to promote opportunities for teacher-student and student-student talk in the classroom, as well as to teach vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies explicitly. Graves and Watts-Taffe argue for the development of word consciousness – an interest in and awareness of words, so that learner have “the will and the skill” to improve their vocabularies (2002, p. 160). They suggest that word consciousness can be fostered through adult modelling and promoting word play (e.g. use of homophones, homographs, idioms, puns, word-play books).

Regarding the direct teaching of vocabulary, research indicates that words taught should be carefully chosen in terms of importance (linking to curriculum content is effective) and should be encountered in different contexts over an extended period of time in order to be “learned” (P. M. Cunningham, 2006; National Reading Panel, 2000). Teaching of word-learning strategies, in particular the use of context cues, the use of parts of words to access meaning of new words, and dictionary use have been shown to be efficient teaching strategies (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002).

Beyond the issue of vocabulary, children’s knowledge of the world, understanding of concepts, ability to categorise and ability to link knowledge are important factor in their reading development. Since knowledge is organised into schema, through which individuals make sense of and remember their experiences of the world and which assist in the comprehension of text, any pedagogy of reading needs to take into account the knowledge base of learners. According to Neuman, the role of knowledge in the early years at school has been “overlooked” and unless skill development and conceptual knowledge development happen simultaneously in schools, disadvantaged children will fall further and further behind their more privileged counterparts (Neuman, 2006, p. 38).

Neuman makes a case for content-rich classrooms which use literacy-in-practice to help to build children’s schema in core subject areas. She argues (Neuman, 2006, pp.35-36) that children’s knowledge base can be increased in schools through:

- Integrated (thematic) instruction;
- Active engagement of the learner’s mind;
- High levels of teacher interaction with children to scaffold their learning;
- Recognizing the importance of children’s play in representing and practicing skills and knowledge;
- Helping children to develop competence and self-esteem.

These insights provide a very useful framework for the analysis of the data collected in this study.

2.3.3 Fluency instruction

All the major US, UK and Australian- government-sponsored reports mentioned in Section 2.2.4 argue that it is important for learners to develop reading fluency in order to comprehend what they read. Traditionally, fluency has been taken to mean reading quickly, smoothly and accurately with good phrasing and expression. As outlined in Section 2.2.2, skills researchers emphasise the rapid and automatic recognition of words (fluency) as essential for comprehension. Abadzi (2004), for example, argues that a reader needs to be able to read a 7-word sentence in 12 seconds in order to understand the message of the sentence, because short-term memory for the meaning of individual words is so brief. She makes the case that if reading speed is lower than 60 words per minute (or one word per second), the reader is unable to remember what was said in earlier parts of a sentence, and that this negatively affects comprehension (2006, p. 47). Abadzi urges that children should be assisted to develop this level of reading speed by the end of Grade 2.

However, this approach is challenged by Flurkey (1997, cited in Weaver, 2002, p.110) who reminds us that readers read at different rates for different purposes, even within the same text. By investigating the correlation between the types of miscues made during reading and the reading rate, Flurkey found that pauses and regressions in reading are linked to the use of strategies for constructing meaning. The more a reader focuses on constructing meaning at a particular point in a text, the longer the time spent at that point in the text. Even proficient readers may not read fluently when reading to comprehend. From this perspective, fluency does not have to be developed before comprehension can occur.

Some children read highly accurately, but not fluently (i.e. with phrasing and intonation and at a reasonable speed). A number of possible explanations for this have been advanced (Allington, 2001, p. 71-4). It could be because of limited experiences of being read to by fluent readers prior to school. It could also be because learners who are often required to read aloud have learned to check the responses of the teacher/monitor. A third possibility is that the lack of fluency is caused by too little practice on appropriately levelled materials. Allington says, "What I worry most about is the possibility that we literally teach some children slow reading and the slow reading becomes a habit" (2001, p. 74).

Research shows that fluency can be developed. A key strategy is some form of repeated reading (Samuels, 1979, 2002). The technique is especially useful in developing fluent reading in children who are struggling. Repeated reading has a greater positive effect on fluency than listening repeatedly to the same story, than practicing word recognition of words to be found in the passage out of context, or than showing the reader where the phrase boundaries are. Concerns about the value of repeated reading relate to cross-text transfer. The extent of transfer depends on the number of words common to the practiced and new texts (Samuels, 2002, p. 179).

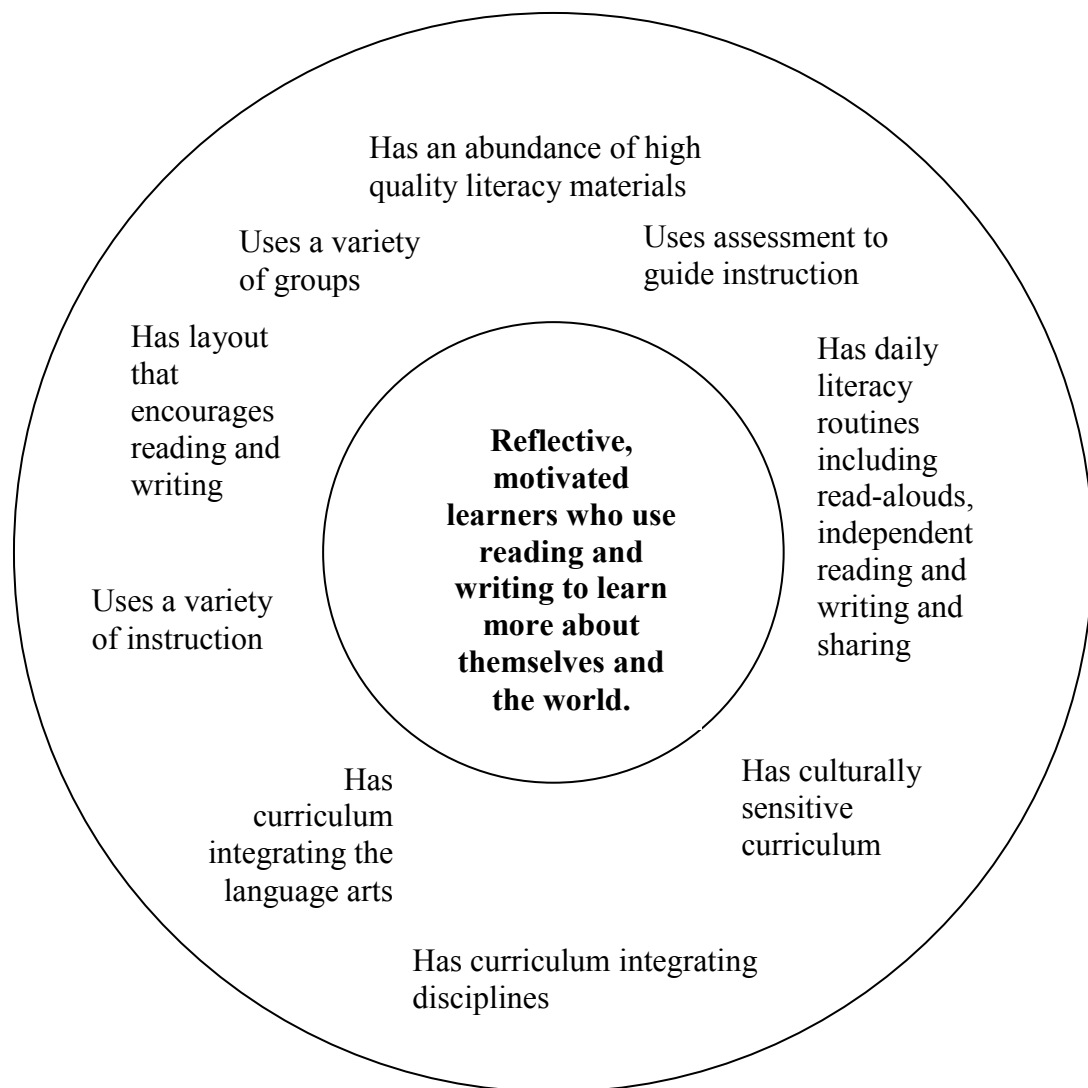
2.3.4 A literacy-rich environment promotes reading for meaning

The organisation of the visual environment itself helps to construct and provide a model of the child's relationship to language and to the written word. The walls of the classroom become the walls of the world. (Street, 1995, p. 21)

In this study a key methodology is to use “the writing on the wall” to provide information about literacy teaching and learning in the sample school, and about teacher’s beliefs and attitudes about literacy. Researchers agree that classroom literacy environments play an important role in literacy development (Cambourne, 2000; Hoffman, 2004b; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). In addition a number of studies have shown the links between literacy-rich classroom environments and effective teaching (McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, & Brooks, 1999; Metsala et al., 1997; Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Taylor, Blum, & Logsdon, 1986).

I define a literacy-rich classroom environment as a setting which promotes literacy development, stimulating learners *to participate* in language and literacy activities in their daily lives in such a way that they begin to develop understandings of the uses and functions of oral and written language. Figure 6 depicts the characteristics of literacy-rich classrooms. This understanding of a literacy-rich environment involves more than simply access to reading materials. The central purpose of a print-rich environment, as Figure 6 on the next page shows, is motivation to use reading and writing in meaningful ways, and this is supported by a number of curricular resources and procedures.

Figure 6: Characteristics of a literacy-rich classroom
 (Source: McGee & Richgels, 1996, p. 181)



Old, but still highly relevant research by Teale (1978) reviewed studies of early readers in order to identify factors that are repeatedly associated with a positive environment for learning to read. These studies showed that learning to read was enhanced by the following environmental factors:

- **Availability and range of printed materials in the environment:** Learning to read is enhanced by accessibility of printed materials on a wide range of subjects and genres (e.g. storybooks, alphabet books, an array of environmental print, labels of cans, telephone directories, maps).

- **Reading is “done” in the environment:** The environment acquaints children with the functions of print and sensitises children to the structure and nature of written language as well as the language of books.
- **The environment facilitates contact with paper and pencil:** Children have the opportunity to scribble, draw, write and copy objects and letters.
- **Adults in the environment respond to what the child is trying to do:** Frequent quality interaction with family members, teachers, and siblings in reading activities is important.

Communities of different socio-economic status offer their children different kinds of literate environments, both in terms of common language use and function and in terms of availability and access to reading material. This has been very well documented (see for example, Barton, 1994; Duke, 2000; Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986). Here I focus on the literacy environments encountered by children in schools. However, it must be borne in mind that the experiences a child has with literacy prior to school impact on the kinds of experiences which are necessary in school. For example, D. Rose (2006) argues that the striking distinction between spoken and written ways of communicating is that speaking involves direct interaction with one or more others, but reading and writing involve interaction with a book. For a child from an oral family culture, he argues, “interacting with a book as though it is a person may be a very strange form of consciousness indeed” (2006, p. 3). He goes on to say that, “In order to read with understanding and engagement it is essential to conceptualise the book as a partner in an exchange of meaning” (2006, p. 4-5). Middle class children are oriented to this kind of meaning through the thousands of hours of story-book reading that they engage in with their caregivers prior to school entry, but those whose family culture is more oral battle to learn this orientation to meaning and suffer the consequences thereof throughout life.

While early experiences with literacy vary dramatically, the print environment encountered by children in schools and preschools makes “an enormous contribution to the child's interest and curiosity about learning to read” (Neuman, 2004, p. 91), providing opportunities for engagement which the child might otherwise not have. Snow et al. found that rich classroom literacy environments “can compensate for less than ideal home environments” (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991, p. 86). Children’s vocabulary and word

recognition improved more when their classrooms contained a variety of workbooks, dictionaries and other reference materials, story books that represented a wide range of difficulty levels, including longer pieces of writing, and when students had frequent visits to the library.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the more we read, the better we get at reading, which again points to the importance of a classroom environment which encourages wide reading. Allington showed that higher-achieving students read approximately three times as much each week *in the classroom* that their lower achieving classmates (2001, p. 25). Juel's cohort study of US low-income (disadvantaged) good and poor readers in the first four grades found that by the fourth grade, the average-to-top group read almost four times as much at home and twice as much in school as the bottom quartile children. By fourth grade, only one out of five of the poor reading group said they enjoyed reading, as opposed to 9 out of 10 of the good reader group. Forty percent of poor readers would rather clean their rooms than read, compared to 5% of the average to good reader groups. Or, as one of the poor readers said "I'd rather clean the mould around the bathtub than read" (Juel, 1994, p.120, cited in Honig, 2001, p. 44). Allington also found that lower-achieving students spent more time reading aloud (usually to the teacher in small group situations) and calculated that such children would probably read one quarter of the number of words in the same period than they would have read if they were reading silently to themselves. In the South African context it was found that children who read once a week at home have an advantage of 5% in literacy tests. If they read at home 3 times a week this advantage increases to 10% and for more than 3 times a week it increases to 12% (Schreuder, 2008, p. 28).

Texts must be present for reading to occur – whether they are brought into the classroom or created within it. I now focus briefly on the antecedents of this study regarding some categories of text which were identified for discussion in Chapter 5.

First, if we want learners to be able to read, understand and write extended text, they need to practice reading and writing extended texts (Duke, 2000, p. 443). The reading of single letters, words, phrases or single sentences is discouraged by major research reports (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Second, research supports the creation and ownership of text by teachers and students (Ng, 2006). Language Experience texts have been shown to be particularly valuable in promoting early concepts about print, and in low-budget contexts can also provide reading material for the classroom library (Flanagan, 1995). Other literature focuses on the value of displaying student-generated text in the classroom. Hoffman (2004a) reports on Taylor, Blum, and Logsdon's research (1986) in which 13 kindergarten teachers were trained to create classroom environments aimed to foster the development of initial literacy. The rooms were filled with prominently displayed student generated texts centred on children's interests, language, and purposes. Children in these classrooms outperformed other children on all measures of reading performance.

Third, literacy-related play areas in early childhood classrooms in which children have opportunities to use literacy in classroom models of familiar contexts such as post offices, primary health clinics, offices or kitchens, are important parts of a meaning-oriented classroom environment. They are supported by Saracho and Spodek (2006), Morrow and Schickedanz (2006), Neuman (2004) and Neuman and Roskos (1992).

Fourth, in a literacy rich environment which foregrounds the meaning of what is read, signs in the classroom are not simply decorative, but have meaning for children. They communicate the message that literacy is an integral part of daily activity (Neuman, 2004, p. 91) and stimulate children to *use* literacy.

Fifth, in Section 2.2 debates regarding the best texts for reading instruction and development were discussed in relation to different theories of the reading process. However, literacy cannot occur in a book void (E. J. Pretorius & Machet, 2004, p. 59) and in many developing contexts, including large parts of South Africa, the issue is less one of the most appropriate texts than of access to texts. I shall return to this issue shortly.

Sixth, as indicated by the broad definition of a print-rich environment given above, the way in which texts are used in the classroom is also important in how children learn to focus on meaning in reading. For example, workbook activities, on which many children spend an inordinate amount of time, have no positive relationship with reading achievement (Allington, 2001, p.27) and tend to focus on isolated skill development rather than meaning.

Returning to the issue of access to texts, much of the literature on classroom environments focuses on classroom libraries (often called “Reading Corners” in South Africa). Research shows that the more books in a classroom library, the more frequently children are likely to read (and the more likely they are to read books they can manage successfully), and the better the school is likely to achieve. Unsurprisingly, it is also clear that the wealthier the neighbourhood and school, the bigger the collection of books in the classroom is likely to be (Allington, 2001). Access to books *in* South African classrooms is highly differentiated and in many cases not seen as a priority in school budgeting, particularly at Foundation Phase level. School libraries are usually prioritised. A number of South African programmes which aim to put books into classrooms have been evaluated and report positive results (see the evaluation of READ by Schollar, 2002). Notwithstanding, attitudes such as that of the teacher in charge of book ordering for a rural Zululand school are common: “It is no use ordering books for Grade 1, because they cannot read yet” (Head of Foundation Phase, Personal communication, 2006).

When considering access to reading materials, it is important to bear in mind that “access means not only availability of books, but also time for reading them” (Krashen, 1996, in International Reading Association, 2000, p. 2).

It has already been shown how proponents of different understandings of the reading process variously emphasise the content, style and structure of instructional text. An additional concern is raised by Duke (1999, 2000) who hypothesises that the apparent weaknesses which students experience in reading and writing informational (non-fiction) texts in senior primary and secondary schools is related to their lack of experience with such texts in early years (1999, p. 27). She regards the ability to read and write informational text as an important form of semiotic capital (1999, p. 3) and a key focus of schooling. However, she found that such texts were rarely present in Grade 1 classrooms, particularly in low-income classrooms and that extremely little time (an average of less than 4 minutes a day) was spent engaging with such texts in the USA. More time was spent engaging with story books because of their motivating influence.

Nevertheless, reading fiction or non-fiction books aloud to children is of crucial importance in the process of learning to read, yet my observations are that it is not a regular practice in many South African classrooms. Reading aloud models what expert reading sounds like.

When the content of the text read aloud is engaging as in the reading of stories, we call this “Reading aloud for pleasure.” This use of texts is very widely supported by research (see, for example, Cramer, 1975; Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986; Moustafa, 1997; Pilgreen & Krashen, 1993; Trelease, 2001; Wells, 1986). It develops and enriches children’s language, builds their understanding of reading and writing concepts, motivates them, and helps them to develop understandings of story structure and genre (Mackie, 2007). It has also been argued that reading for pleasure has a positive relationship with educational success and could counteract the educational disadvantages attributable to poverty and other forms of social disadvantage (C. Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002; Reeves et al., 2008, p. 59).

In order for learners to read for meaning, the level of text read is also of importance. Research consistently shows that tasks completed with a high rate of success are linked to greater learning and improved student attitude. Betts (1934) showed that relatively low error rates produced improved learning. Betts established a rating scale for levels of difficulty of text for school children, which are still used today:

- **Independent-level reading** which requires little or no adult assistance (98% word recognition accuracy, fluent reading and 90% comprehension accuracy);
- **Instructional level reading** which requires reading and instructional support from a teacher (95-97% accuracy, 75% comprehension and phrase-level reading);
- **Frustration-level reading** which has a very negative effect on both learning and attitude (accuracy below 95%, comprehension below 75%).

At least two important pedagogical considerations stem from this. Firstly children need to be matched to texts to maximise learning. They need instructional texts that they can read accurately, fluently and with good comprehension. In South Africa, there is a growing tendency for publishers to produce readers for a whole class, rather than graded reading material which various learners can use at various levels. This strategy clearly caters for economies of scale but not for diversity of achievement, and it is unlikely that most learners using these texts will be reading at their instructional level.

2.3.5 Metalinguistic awareness

Current directions in research about learning indicate that more effective learners are more aware of their own mental processes or have greater metacognitive awareness than less effective learners. According to Wray (1998), the two “most replicated results” of studies of metagognition in reading are firstly that “younger and poorer readers have little awareness that they must attempt to make sense of text; they focus on reading as a decoding process, rather than as a meaning-getting process” (Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 358 quoted in Wray, 1998, p. 4); and secondly, that “younger children and poorer readers are unlikely to demonstrate that they notice major blocks to text understanding. They seem not to realise when they do not understand” (Garner & Reis, 1981, p. 571, quoted in Wray, 1998, p. 4). Wray concludes that the reading teacher therefore needs to promote the learners’ awareness of their own thinking and learning and to ensure that basic literacy skills are taught in a context which is meaningful for the learners. These findings have relevance to the present study, in which it is argued that teachers tend to pay scant attention to presenting reading as a process which is concerned with meaning.

One component of this awareness of thinking and learning, namely being able to reflect upon and talk about language as an object of thought, is referred to as metalinguistic awareness (Pratt & Grieve, 1984). The term is used in the literature to refer to a wide variety of components, including understanding the purposes of reading, the ability to identify words, the ability to segment words into phonemes, the ability to define instructional terms and understanding the relationship of speech to print. Dreher and Zenge (1990) list numerous references for each of these ways of using the term. In the process of formal schooling daily instruction involves many of the abilities listed above, particularly as children learn to read. Thus children who do not fully grasp the meaning of metalinguistic concepts such as what a sentence is, or who find it difficult to identify and manipulate the sub-units of spoken language are at some disadvantage at school.

Dreher and Zenge (1990) point out that agreement exists that metalinguistic awareness is associated with developing the ability to read, though how this occurs remains controversial. Is it a prerequisite for learning to read, the result of reading instruction, the result of cognitive development in middle childhood or is there “reciprocal causation” between metalinguistic awareness and reading? Although metalinguistic awareness in Grade 1 has been shown to

predict reading comprehension in Grades 3 and 5 (Dreher & Zenge, 1990), Whitfield's study in KwaZulu-Natal showed clearly that such awareness on entering Grade 1 was not predictive of success at the end of that year, because children were able to develop metalinguistic awareness through teacher-mediated tasks (Whitfield, 1996).

Metalinguistic awareness is an essential tool for teachers who approach instruction in text comprehension explicitly, and who make use of their consciousness of their own reading strategies to model and teach text comprehension. Such teachers typically conduct mini-lessons focusing on various aspects of comprehension, in the context of texts, and "think aloud" about how they themselves approach the text for comprehension. This modelling of strategies assists the learner to be aware of what good readers do and helps to develop comprehension skills.

2.3.6 The reading-writing connection assists reading for meaning

Research indicates a strong reciprocal relationship between reading and writing (Clay, 1991; McGuinness, 2005; Snow et al., 1998; Tierney & Pearson, 1983; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991; Tracey & Morrow, 2002). Students who write well tend to read a lot, and good readers are generally good writers (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 314). Writing helps the learner to master letter-sound relationships and a lot more. However, despite the fact that reading and writing develop together, the idea that writing should not be a focus of classroom work until reading is well established, appears to be commonplace among teachers in South Africa.

It is effective for children to learn about writing by watching the teacher model the process, think aloud about content, directionality, spelling, punctuation, audience and so on. In primary classrooms this commonly takes the form of the teacher writing a "morning message" (modelled writing) or a language experience text (shared writing).

It is important for beginning writers to have real, meaningful, and enjoyable writing experiences and to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. They need to write about things that are meaningful to them.

The connection between reading and writing is shown clearly by “invented spelling”. This approach encourages beginning literates to spell words using their phonological knowledge. They are spontaneously capable of spelling words in a systematically abstract, though not conventional, manner and this occurs in a developmental sequence (Richgels, 2003). The implications of invented spelling and the reading-writing connection for reading instruction are significant. Firstly, reading and writing should be taught simultaneously as they have a reciprocal relationship. Secondly, children should be encouraged to use their phonological knowledge to invent spellings of words.

2.4 ISSUES: CHILDREN LEARNING TO READ

The forgoing sections have raised a number of questions or debates which have relevance to an understanding of how children learn to read on which I now expand briefly. I begin by considering whether reading is a maturational or a developmental process, then move on to the question of whether beginning reading and mature reading are similar or different processes. The third question relates to whether learning to read in a second language is the same as learning to read in the mother tongue, and the interrelation between the two. The fourth question is about whether delays in reading can be reversed. Fifth, I consider whether children from poor, marginalised and low-literacy communities require different pedagogies, as has been argued increasingly in recent years. Finally, I briefly discuss current debates regarding how phonics should be taught. These six questions are all relevant to the present case study.

2.4.1 Is early reading a maturational or developmental process?

The notion that children need to be “ready” to learn to read appears to have been used first by Patrick (1899) in his article entitled “*Should children under 10 learn to read and write?*” However the seminal works on reading readiness are by Huey (1908) and Morphet and Washburne (1931). In essence, this approach claims that biological maturation is a necessary precondition for learning. The concept of readiness was dominant for the first half of the 20th Century and is strongly associated with skills-based models of the reading process. This dominance had three important consequences: the emergence of a lucrative industry around reading readiness activities and materials; the hegemony of the notion that reading is about

perceptual identification and matching; and the absolute distinction between being a reader and a non-reader (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p. 4). A major consequence of behaviourism and “reading readiness” was that researchers did not see the need to focus on children’s thinking about or use of reading and writing before formal schooling.

It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that researchers started taking seriously literacy in early childhood (before entering formal schooling). Although Durkin (1993) investigated children who are already able to read when they start school, this was explicitly study of atypical children. A shift in focus occurred when Clay (1969) and later Goodman (1973/2003) started looking at children’s strategic sense-making behaviours when engaged in literacy activities. Thus emerged the field of “emergent literacy”, which focused on the literate behaviours of young children before entering formal schooling who cannot yet read or write conventionally (Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 1999).

Emergent literacy refers to the natural and gradual development of reading and writing abilities from birth till the start of formal schooling. The approach of emergent literacy ushered in a conception of literacy as a broad set of print related activities, challenging a linear, intrapersonal view of literacy, and emphasising the connection between reading and writing. The importance of contextual factors such as parents/caregivers and literacy rich environments was highlighted. As Razfar and Gutiérrez observe (2003, p. 37) the methodological implication of emergent literacy studies was a shift from controlled experimental studies to the study of situated practice, often using ethnographic methodology.

More recently, social semiotic theory, which focuses on the ways in which meaning is created in social contexts, brought to the field of study of early literacy important new insights, among other things, about the ways in which children transform the world by the ways they represent things that interest them. This represents a shift away from “emergence” or *becoming* literate, towards *different ways of being* literate. From this perspective, the practices and products of early childhood literacy are valued for what they are, rather than being seen as “inadequate manifestations of adult literacy” (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p. 10). The curriculum in place in South Africa at the time of this research espouses this perspective.

Many models of reading (e.g. Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1991, Gough and Juel, 1991; Spear-Swerling, 2004) describe a series of phases that nearly all beginning readers go through in the

same sequence, though at different rates. The International Reading Association and the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC/IRA, 1998) identify 5 stages in their position statement on developmentally appropriate practices for young children. These are:

1. Awareness and exploration (preschool) also called Role-play reading;
2. Experimental reading and writing (roughly Grade 0/R level);
3. Early reading and writing (roughly Grade 1);
4. Transitional reading and writing (Grade 2);
5. Independent reading and writing (Grade 3);
6. The First Steps programme (Rees, 1994) adds a further step: Advanced reading and writing.

The South African education policy outlines 8 unnamed steps towards reading development, details of which can be found in Figure 7 below. Overall, the content of the South African steps roughly corresponds to the NAEYC/IRA lists.

Research indicates that these developmental stages are common to children learning a variety of alphabetic languages, but in “transparent alphabetic languages, children may advance more rapidly through the initial phases of learning to read than do children learning English” (Spear-Swerling, 2004, p. 526). There does not appear to be research which relates these developmental reading stages to African languages.

Figure 7: Reading steps: What learners can do

(Source: South Africa. National Department of Education (2008b), pp.20-21)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. I can open and page through a book. 2. I talk about pictures in a text 3. I can listen to a story with understanding. 4. I can read my own name. 5. I know what a letter is and can name some letters. 6. I know what a word is and can recognise a few words 7. I can say or sing some rhymes.	1. I can read and understand some texts (20 to 40 texts). 2. I can make sense of the illustrations in texts. 3. I can listen to a story with understanding. 4. I can answer questions about a story I have heard. 5. I know all the letter names. 6. I know all the letter sounds. 7. I can sound out three-letter words. 8. I can read over 50 common words (and, the, me, etc).	1. I can read and understand some texts (20-40 texts). 2. I can answer questions about texts I have read. 3. I can make sense of the illustrations in books. 4. I can listen to a story with understanding. 5. I can answer questions about a story I have heard. 6. I can retell a story I have heard. 7. I can sound out the beginning letters of words. 8. I can look at word endings and sort words into word families. 9. I know that vowels sound different in different words. 10. I can read words with a silent e at the end of the word.	1. I can read and understand longer texts (20-40 texts). 2. I can answer written questions about texts I have read. 3. I can make sense of illustrations in books. 4. I can listen to a story with understanding. 5. I can retell a story I have heard. 6. I can sound out vowels in the middle of words. 7. I know that vowels can sound different in different words. 8. I can sort words into word families.. 9. I can find words that rhyme. 10. I can sound out words beginning with two or three consonants.	1. I can read and understand stories. 2. I can read and understand poems 3. I can read and understand information texts. 4. I can read and understand posters. 5. I can use a dictionary. 6. I can answer oral and written questions about texts (comprehensions). 7. I can write a book report. 8. I can complete a summary of a text. 9. I can sound out or make good guesses about new words as I read. 10. I can read and spell 300 common words.	1. I can read and understand stories and chapter books. 2. I can talk about characters, plots and illustrations in a story. 3. I can read and understand children's magazines. 4. I can read and understand elements of poetry (rhyme etc). 5. I can read and understand elements of information texts (instructions, plans, timetables, recipes, maps etc) I can use a contents page and an index. 6. I can read and reply to invitations and messages. 7. I can use a dictionary, sound out or make informed guesses about new words.	1. I can read and understand stories and chapter books. 2. I can talk about characters, settings, plots, illustrations and values in a story. 3. I can read and understand elements of poetry (rhyme, alliteration, simile etc). 4. I can read and understand elements of information texts (instructions, plans, timetables, recipes, maps etc) I can use a contents page and an index. 5. I can read and understand advertisements. 6. I can use a dictionary, sound out or make informed guesses about new words. 7. I can answer oral and written questions about texts (comprehensions).	1. I can read and understand chapter books. 2. I can talk about the main points and purpose of the text as well as the characters and plot. 3. I can read and understand elements of poetry (rhyme, alliteration, simile etc). 4. I can read and reply to invitations and personal letters. 5. I can read and understand elements of information texts (instructions, plans, timetables, recipes, maps, etc). 6. I can use a dictionary, thesaurus, contents page and an index.	1. I can read and understand stories. 2. I can read and understand poems. 3. I can read and understand information texts. 4. I can read and understand magazine articles. 5. I can read and understand Invitations. 6. I can use a dictionary. 7. I can answer complex questions about text. 8. I can complete a summary of a text. 9. I can listen to a story with understanding. 10. I can sound out or make informed guesses about new words. 11. I can read and spell 300 (sic) common words.
		(continued overleaf)	(continued overleaf)		(continued overleaf)	(continued overleaf)	(continued overleaf)	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		<p>11. I can sound out words with three or four letters.</p> <p>12. I can read 100 common words (and, the, me, etc).</p>	<p>11. I can read and spell 200 common words (and, the, me, etc).</p>		<p>8. I can answer oral and written questions about tests (comprehensions).</p> <p>9. I can complete a summary of a text and a book report.</p> <p>10. I can read and spell 400 common words.</p>	<p>8. I can complete a summary of a text, a book report and a book or film review.</p> <p>9. I can read and spell 500 common words.</p>	<p>7. I can read and analyse advertisements and pamphlets.</p> <p>8. I can use different reading strategies to make informed guesses about new words.</p> <p>9. I can answer oral and written questions about texts (comprehensions).</p> <p>10. I can complete a summary of a text as well as a book report and a book and film review.</p> <p>11. I can read and spell 600 common words.</p> <p>12. I can read in different ways (skimming, scanning, read slowly and carefully etc).</p>	

A key concept relating to emergent literacy is “awareness of print”. Children who are raised in print-rich environments or who have been to preschool, usually start school with an awareness that print (writing) is a source of information, that (in reading an alphabetic texts) written words are different from pictures, that the message conveyed by a particular piece of text does not change, that there can be a relationship between experience and writing, and that texts are organised in predictable ways (T. D. Johnson, 1992, p. 72). They know how to turn the pages of a book and know the conventions for reading books in the particular script used in their community. Marie Clay’s widely used “Concepts of Print Test” (Clay, 1985) pays attention to the reader-like behaviours listed above. Children who do not have an awareness of print when they start school, as in the case of many South African children, need to develop this awareness at school, and explicit teaching of these concepts is most beneficial.

2.4.2 Is beginning reading the same as fluent reading?

In the previous section it was asserted that learning to read is a process which begins early on in life and continues with practice throughout life. But is mature reading different from beginning reading? If it is, is it different in degree or in kind? Should a theory of reading acquisition³ be different from a theory of reading in general? And what are the implications of the answers to these questions for a pedagogy of learning to read? These are deeply ideological questions, and answers have a lot to do with how reading itself is defined. A proponent of a whole-language view of the reading process (Section 2.2.3) might argue that beginning and later reading are the same, whereas proponents of a bottom-up view of reading, as described in Section 2.2.2 might see the period of mastering the component skills (learning to decode) as employing different processes from the period of mastery (interpreting, applying, appreciating). Frith (1985), for example, argues for a stage theory of

³ A word is necessary at this point about the term reading or literacy “acquisition” which is often imprecisely used to cover the formal process of learning to read. Strictly speaking acquisition refers to informal learning processes, such as the acquisition of a first language, and should therefore not be used in relation to the formal and intentional process of being taught to read in a school. Krashen (1994 p. 45) puts it thus: “Language learning is a conscious process that results in ‘knowing about’ language. Language acquisition is ‘incidental’ (as contrasted with intentional) and ‘implicit’ (as contrasted with explicit learning), while language learning is intentional and explicit.”

reading acquisition, which involves different ways of reading at different stages. In contrast, Jackson and Coltheart (2001) and Castles, Bates and Coltheart (2006), amongst others, present evidence that learning to read involves “a progressive expansion” (Coltheart, 2006, p. 10) of the system used by fluent readers. In terms of the Dual Route Model of reading, already discussed in Section 2.2.4, a beginning reader would be able to use orthography, phonology and semantics to read by the lexical route (though there would be quantitative differences in the number of words a beginning reader would be able to read compared to a skilled reader), and would also be able to use graphophonemic correspondence (a non-lexical procedure), again with quantitative differences from a skilled reader. When someone learns to read, according to this model, they are learning “the mental architecture” represented in Figure 2.

Recent physiological research supports the idea that beginning reading and mature reading are different in the sense that they make use of different areas of the brain, but this does not mean that the *processes* involved in early reading are essentially different from those involved later. Neuroimaging research indicates that non-proficient readers make use of the left parieto-temporal area of the brain (involved in word analysis), and the Broca’s area (for articulation and word analysis). Together these areas link letters and sounds to decode words slowly and deliberately. Fluent readers use these areas of the brain far less, and activate the left occipito-temporal region which appears to be involved in automatic word recognition (Pugh, Sandak, Frost, Moore, & Mencl, 2006; Shaywitz, 2003; Sousa, 2005). In typically developing children, there is increasing specialisation for reading in the left ventral system, as their reading skill increases. While this work provides interesting insights into the workings of the brain, it should be borne in mind that the tasks given to subjects in the Shaywitz studies, for example involved reading lists of isolated words, which from all but a bottom-up perspective “cannot be thought to represent ‘reading’” (Coles, 2003, p. 169).

I also think there is a danger in overemphasising the role of the brain in the development of complex cognitive behaviours. Vygotsky argued that “higher mental functions” such as reading and writing, perception, attention and reasoning also have complex social origins such as social interactions and learning to use specific cultural tools (e.g. reading print) and cannot be explained purely in terms of biologically determined, natural processes (Bodrova & Leong, 2006, p. 245). According to Vygotsky, children are able to develop their mental processes because they “gain control” of their behaviour by developing and using cultural

tools (Bodrova & Leong, 2006, p. 247). An example is developing the use of deliberate memory through the use of drawing and writing. In other words, from a Vygotskian perspective, beginning reading would be distinguished from mature reading by the development of higher mental functions both through the reading and as a prerequisite for the reading.

The work of Marie Clay, the eminent researcher of emergent literacy, resonates with this idea of “gaining control”. In her book *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control* (1991) she argues that the task of reading acquisition is to build the inner strategic control that allows the reader to increasingly use many sources of information (the meaning, the structure of sentences, the order of ideas/words/letters, features of sound, shape or layout, as well as existing knowledge and past experiences) to learn independently from what they read. She argues that failing readers seem to lack this inner control.

This thesis proceeds from the position that beginning readers engage in the same processes while reading as mature readers do, but that as readers practice more and encounter more texts, they demonstrate increasing fluency, increasing ability to use a range of strategies to access meaning from text and increasing ability to think about their reading in more complex ways. The acquisition of reading skills changes the way a reader performs the reading task, but does not change the nature of the task itself.

2.4.3 Is second language reading the same as first language reading?

Overwhelming research supports the position that children are advantaged by schooling in their home language. Cummins (2000) points out that approximately 150 empirical studies in the past 30 years “show beneficial effects of additive bilingualism on students' linguistic, cognitive or academic growth” (cited in E.J. Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007, p. 39). However, it is important to distinguish between research which focuses on the language (medium) of instruction in general, and issues relating specifically to reading and learning to read in a primary or additional language.

Krashen (2003, p. 57) presents 16 different studies which show that learning to read in the primary language facilitates learning to read in a second language and that correlations

between reading abilities across languages are higher for younger children than older ones. His argument is that we learn to read by reading and understanding what is on the page. It is easier to understand text in a language you already know. Once you can read, you can read: reading ability transfers across languages (2003, p. 56):

The specific skills or lack of skills that a student has carries directly over into second language reading. For instance a student who was taught only to decode in Spanish will carry this imbalance into English language, and not use meaning as a cue, a severe handicap in English reading. Students who have learned to monitor themselves and self-correct often in Spanish, will carry this skill into English reading....Students who learn to think carefully about what they read, the story line and abstract concepts will carry this comprehension skill into their second language reading....I have absolutely no question that primary language instruction assists in the acquisition of English literacy. (Krashen, 2003, p. 61)

Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) identify two main hypotheses which underlie the language/reading question in second language research. The first hypothesis holds that literacy operations and constructs can be transferred from one language to another without having to be re-learned. They point out that it is generally assumed that the direction of transfer is from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2), and that the reverse situation is very under-researched. It is important to note that in Africa, many readers never acquire literacy in their own language, and there are very few opportunities for extensive reading in African languages.

The second hypothesis is that a certain level, or linguistic threshold, of L2 proficiency, is needed before L1 reading skills and knowledge can be transferred to L2. This is why Macdonald's seminal 1990 study of South African children switching to L2 instruction in Grade 4 was called *The Threshold Project* (Macdonald, 1990). Bernhardt and Kamil say that this assumes that "language is the key factor in reading activities... in order to read a language, one has to 'know' the language" (1995, p. 17).

Much of the international literature available about reading and learning to read speaks about reading and learning to read in English as if what is true for this language is universally true for all languages. In fact, very often writers and researchers do not even acknowledge explicitly that they are referring specifically to reading in the English language. There is an unsubstantiated assumption that learning to read is a universal process, no matter whether one is learning in Chinese or in isiZulu. This problem persists in the South African literature and a very fertile field of study is being ignored as a result. However, the structure, orthography

and phonology of particular languages is significant in learning to read those languages. Linguists classify languages as having "shallow" or "deep" orthographies, referring to the directness with which phonological information is encoded. For example, English is defined as having a deep, irregular, opaque orthography, because there is such a complex and irregular correspondence between graphemes and phonemes in English. In contrast, languages such as Spanish, Afrikaans and isiZulu have shallow, transparent, orthographies because of the very direct spelling-sound correspondence. It has been suggested that a bias towards a lexical or a non-lexical processing strategy may be tied to the depth of the orthography of a language (Klein, 1996, p. 354). In shallow orthographies a greater reliance on phonology may be useful, whereas in English, the role of non-lexical strategies is more important in coming to meaning.

A further issue, raised by Reeves et al. (2008), relates to the language-learning process of L1 and L2. They argue that while L1 is learned through implicit processes, L2 requires far more explicit teaching. The implication is that reading through the medium of L2 needs to be taught more explicitly than for L1 learners, and the Reeves study goes so far as to argue that the whole-language approach to teaching reading is not appropriate for L2 learners. This issue is picked up again in the Section 2.4.5 below.

2.4.4 Can delays in learning reading be reversed?

As will be shown in Chapter 3, the majority of Grade 1 learners in the South Africa do not meet expected standards on standardised reading tests. Research suggests that children who are poor readers in Grade 1 will probably continue to struggle with reading, and therefore other academic subjects throughout their lives (Butler, Marsh, Sheppard, & Sheppard, 1985; Clay, 1991; A. E. Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Juel, 1988). Only one out of 8 children who are not reading at grade level by the end of the first grade will ever read on grade level (Juel, 1988, p.24). Longitudinal studies show that disadvantaged 3rd graders in America who fail one or more grades are unlikely to complete high school (Ng, 2006, p. 154). Good readers get better at reading while poor readers continue to be poor readers. Stanovich (2004, first published in 1986) called this the "Matthew effect," alluding to the book of Matthew in the Bible where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Many things that facilitate further growth in reading comprehension (such as general knowledge,

vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, use of a variety of comprehension strategies) are developed by reading itself and without intervention difficulties in reading are likely to continue even into adulthood. As Stanovich argues, for poor readers, “Reading for meaning is hindered, unrewarding reading experiences multiply and practice is avoided or merely tolerated without real cognitive involvement. The downward spiral continues...” (Stanovich, 2004, p. 458). This research provides a powerful argument for the early identification of reading difficulties and the appropriate early intervention (hence the large-scale government-sponsored reports on early reading in the USA, UK and Australia). It also provides a very powerful argument for the deployment of highly competent and qualified teachers in the early grades at school.

In the developed world, significant money and effort has been directed towards early identification and remediation of children with reading problems. These interventions can be classified into three types: tutoring, phonological awareness and family literacy intervention (Rolla San Francisco, Arias, Villers, & Snow, 2006, p. 189). Perhaps the most famous of such intervention programmes is the Reading Recovery Programme, originated by Marie Clay. This is an intensive 12 – 20 week one-on-one tutoring programme targeting underperforming first grade learners which has been shown to produce significant effects (Viadero & Manzo, 2007). Rolla San Francisco et al.’s research in Costa Rico found that, whereas provision of high quality materials to teachers did not have an impact on children’s early literacy skills (2006, p.197), individual tutoring alone or in combination with other interventions had significant effects on concepts about print and letter identification. They were, however, surprised to find that family literacy and phonological awareness training alone did not produce expected gains in these emergent literacy skills (2006, p.195).

Other types of intervention take as their starting point a more sociological understanding of the production and reproduction of class difference. D. Rose in Australia worked from a Bernsteinian framework to understand how indigenous children were very often left behind in the schooling system. They developed a programme which focused on explicitly teaching children reading and writing in the context of understanding the genre and systemic functional grammar of particular texts they were reading. This Reading to Learn Programme has reportedly led to significant gains for marginalised people (D. Rose, 2007, to appear 2010).

2.4.5 Do socially disadvantaged children need to be taught to read differently?

A number of influential arguments have been made recently that socially disadvantaged children should be taught to read using different pedagogy from more middle-class children. Uniformly these arguments are for more phonics, more drill, and doing away with whole-language methodology.

Delpit sparked huge controversy in America as an African American publishing a series of articles in the *Harvard Education Review* (later compiled into a book) (Delpit, 1995) which argued that approaches to reading instruction which might be good for middle class learners were inappropriate for marginalised communities. Whole language approaches and a de-emphasis on rote learning such as phonic drilling are, she argues, not appropriate for the poor and disenfranchised. All children need meaningful learning that takes their needs into account, and she argues that for many, such learning in fact involves direct instruction.

Delpit's argument has recently been echoed by Helen Abadzi (2006) in a treatise written for the World Bank, and currently enjoying attention in South Africa. Abadzi, a cognitive scientist, makes proposals regarding "efficient learning for the poor". She places high value on getting learners to read fluently by the second grade. She argues that in many countries (and South Africa could well be included in this group), national education budgets buy very little, and ascribes this partly to inefficiencies created by failure to learn reading, such as drop-outs, grade repetition, and a need for extra teacher salaries, classrooms and materials, and even cheating in exams and systemic corruption (2006, p. 136). Abadzi approaches literacy acquisition (which is a multi-dimensional process) from largely two angles, namely a biological perspective (and note that this field of study draws heavily on the study of disability in reading English, which may not provide immediate correspondence to the processes of healthy reading in a variety of languages) and an economic perspective. This, I argue, leads Abadzi to underplay the importance of meaning and purpose in reading. She thus asserts that whole-language teaching and constructivist approaches to education are neither efficient nor effective for the disadvantaged. She advocates direct instruction in analytical and synthetic phonics, in the mother tongue, using text books which facilitate practice of regular letter-sound correspondences. In my opinion, Abadzi does not adequately conceptualise the reading process and even within her own framework does not fully explain

inadequacies of reading development in the poor communities. This is because her approach to a complex process is so deliberately narrow.

The recent Australian report on an inquiry into the teaching of literacy (J. Rose, 2006) takes a similar approach to Abadzi by claiming that a strong body of research suggests that whole-language instruction is “not in the best interests” of children experiencing learning difficulties and

For children from disadvantaged backgrounds who often do not have rich phonological knowledge and phonemic awareness upon which to base new language, being taught under constructivist modes has the effect of compounding their disadvantage once they begin school. This is particularly the case for children from non-English speaking backgrounds, including indigenous children where English may be their second or third language. (J. Rose, 2006, p. 28)

In South Africa, a report on literacy teaching in the Limpopo province (Reeves et al., 2008) also argues that whole-language, constructivist and communicative approaches to language teaching are not appropriate for under-resourced and under-privileged contexts.

Such arguments should be subjected to very careful debate and research. While ALL children require reading teaching that is adapted to their diverse needs, and while explicit instruction has value for ALL children some of the time, great care should be exercised that the way they are taught to read helps them to fully understand that reading is a meaning-making process. Careful research needs to be done to investigate the suggestions that poor children will learn to read better using bottom-up strategies. I assert that, at least in the case of South Africa, children *are already* being taught reading using bottom-up approaches, despite the injunction to the contrary in the curriculum documents (see Section 3.4.1), and it isn't working. The extent to which reading is currently taught explicitly would need to be investigated further, but judging from my own experience observing teaching in classrooms in KwaZulu-Natal, this is not common. It needs to be remembered that explicit instruction can be applied to both top-down and bottom-up reading strategies. The rejection of whole language approaches in favour of “other side of the war”, in other words phonics approaches to teaching reading, without due consideration to integrated approaches and without consideration for the extent to which reading is taught explicitly, seems to be a retrogressive move in relation to theories about reading development. The possible role of economics in making these arguments also needs to be examined – it is of course cheaper and easier not to have to provide the reading materials needed to teach reading in a whole language or in an integrated way, and not to

have to put money and energy into retraining the large number of teachers who themselves approach reading as simply a matter of phonic decoding.

The study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) on literacy in developing countries showed clearly that for nine-year olds, the size of school and classroom libraries “differentiated clearly between education systems that produced high and low literacy scores, relative to the level of development of the society in which the students were educated” (Elley, 1996, p. 46). This study is in line with similar large national surveys in Fiji and Indonesia. The study did not differentiate between quality of books (e.g. the prevalence of text books vs. story books) but “these figures confirm growing experimental evidence that ready access to a wide range of books is a key factor in raising literacy levels. High reading scores are not found in countries that do not contain good school libraries” (Elley, 1996, p. 47). The second most important factor differentiating education systems, according to this report, is the frequency of silent reading. According to the IEA study, more frequent reading to the class by the teacher was not a significant factor.

In the IEA study, the top 5% of readers in each country were asked to choose statements about the best ways to become good readers. On 6 out of 11 items, low and high scoring countries showed a similar choice pattern. But there were marked differences on the other items – readers in high scoring countries rated highly having many good books around, having a lively imagination and learning many new words. Good readers in low-scoring countries chose statements about learning how to sound out the words and doing drill (Elley, 1996, p. 51). Elley concludes that “...these discrepancies are in line with reading theories that claim children learn to read primarily by reading – regular practice in an ability such as reading is required to develop competence.” (1996, p. 52)

2.4.6 Teaching phonics

Both bottom-up and balanced reading theories regard the teaching of phonics as an important component of the development of reading competence. I therefore include a brief discussion on current debates regarding how phonics should be taught.

Current debates regarding the teaching of phonics have centred on whether it should be taught in a synthetic or analytic manner, and how explicit the phonics teaching should be. The USA's National Reading Panel report (2000) advocated systematic phonics instruction in the context of a balanced reading programme; the Australian government report (2005) advocated systematic, direct and explicit phonics in the context of a balanced programme, and the UK's Rose report (J. Rose, 2006) supported systematic, synthetic phonics.

Systematic phonics, according to Mesmer and Griffith (2005, p. 369), involves scope (the range of letter-sound correspondences taught) and sequence (the order for teaching them). Their analysis of how the term was used in a series of studies showed that the term is usually associated with sequenced, code-driven instruction. It could also be a feature of balanced reading instruction. From a whole-language perspective phonics teaching would be driven by the text and would therefore probably not be systematically taught. Many research reports (including the three recent government-sponsored ones) agree that systematic phonics is very important for literacy acquisition (Wyse & Goswami, 2008, p. 694).

The term explicit refers to a kind of lesson delivery in which the teacher tells learners directly and exactly what she is trying to teach (Mesmer & Griffith, 2005, p. 370), demonstrates or models this and learners practice it. According to Mesmer and Griffith (2005, p. 369), all explicit and systematic approaches have in common (a) a curriculum with a specified, sequential set of phonics elements; (b) instruction that is direct, precise, and unambiguous; and (c) practice using phonics in real words.

Explicit, systematic phonics teaching can be accommodated within different theoretical understandings of the reading process. However, whether instruction proceeds analytically (learning letter sounds in the context of whole words which can already be read by sight – going from whole to part) or synthetically (learning to “sound out” words, or building them up from letters and sounds – going from part to whole) is clearly tied to philosophies of reading instruction. The Rose Report (2006), on the basis of which the UK's national literacy strategy was changed, has been criticised for advocating synthetic phonics when the research base actually indicates that “There is currently no strong RCT [randomised controlled trial] evidence that any one form of systematic phonics is more effective than any other” (Torgerson et al., 2006, quoted in Wyse & Goswami, 2008, p. 693). Rose was substantially influenced by an intervention study conducted in Clackmannanshire, Scotland (R. S. Johnson

& Watson, 2005) which made a strong case for explicit, synthetic phonics instruction. Wyse and Goswami criticise the research design of the Clackmannanshire Studies, arguing that it is “not rigorous enough to enable a conclusion about the superiority of one teaching method against the other” (2008, p. 695).

From the perspective that the most effective reading teachers know and are able to teach children to use a variety of strategies and approaches (International Reading Association, 1999), it would seem appropriate that teachers should be trained to teach both analytic and synthetic phonics, in the context of meaningful texts, and to be able to do this in an explicit fashion. However the extent to which they should be trained to teach phonics systematically would depend on the philosophy of reading espoused.

2.4.7 Conclusion

In this section I have reported on six pertinent questions or debates relating to the teaching of reading. Once again it is clear that there are different positions on these issues which relate to different paradigmatic views of the reading process. All these issues are of direct relevance to understanding the data collected in this study.

2.5 READING TEACHERS

This study focuses on how three Grade 1 teachers teach reading and therefore some relevant literature in the large field of study of reading teachers is reviewed here. Every major review of literature on effective reading teaching concludes that teachers, not methods or materials, are crucial to promoting student learning (International Reading Association, 2003, p. 1). “Teachers *can* make a difference” (D. Durkin, 1993, p. 65). In South Africa, studies have found little or no evidence that increased teacher resource factors such as smaller class sizes, higher qualifications, or more experience make a difference to academic achievement in primary schools, but suggest that teaching practices, which are not generally measured, account for variance in achievement (Fleisch, 2008, pp. 90-92).

In this review I have chosen to consider four fields of research regarding reading teachers. The first is research focusing on what teachers believe about teaching reading and how this corresponds to their practice, which is considered in Section 2.5.1 below. In Section 2.5.2, I consider theory and research focusing on the knowledge of reading teachers, and in particular their pedagogic content knowledge. Section 2.5.3 focuses very briefly on research regarding what effective reading teachers do. Finally, in Section 2.5.4, I focus on research regarding the teaching of reading teachers. Together these four aspects of research on reading teachers help to produce an understanding of why teachers teach in the way they do, which is helpful in analysis of the data collected in this study.

2.5.1 Teachers' beliefs about reading and teaching reading

It has long been argued that teachers' beliefs and values influence their judgements and behaviour in the classroom (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Fenstermacher, 1979; Pintrich, 1990) but the field of study is so complex that Pajares (1992, p. 329) refers to the study of teacher's beliefs as a "messy construct." Some of the challenges in the field have been to understand the relationship between knowledge and beliefs, concepts which have been confusingly defined (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Pajares, 1992); the relationship between beliefs and practice (Duffy & Anderson, 1984; Fang, 1996); the relationship between teachers' personal beliefs and socio-historical-cultural contexts in which they were trained and in which they work (Fang, 1996).

Internationally, there have been at least three substantial literature reviews of teachers' beliefs (Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1990; Pajares, 1992). Fang's review (1996, p. 52) cites a number of studies which argue that teachers' theoretical beliefs do shape their teaching of reading, while other studies show how beliefs and practice are inconsistent, and still others argue that there is only a weak relationship between the two. However, Pajares's study (1992) concludes that the research literature supports the view that teacher's educational and pedagogical beliefs and values influence their classroom practice. More recently, Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell, & Wray (2001) found that effective teachers of literacy, as identified by student performance and peer recommendation, showed greater consistency between theoretical beliefs and choice of teaching strategies than less effective teachers.

Pajares argues that researchers are confident that beliefs are formed early and tend to resist change, “persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling or experience” (1992, p. 324). The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter. Newly acquired beliefs are the most vulnerable to change.

A teacher’s own experience of learning to read provides an early and powerful framework for beliefs about reading and about teaching (Raths, 2001). In a broad sense, many teachers believe that the goal of teaching is the transmission of behaviours and skills from teacher to child (Freire, 2007). This informs the “common-sense” belief (Weaver, 2002) that learning to read should involve sounding out of words. Many teachers in South Africa themselves learned to read in this way, and find that their experience has influenced their beliefs about teaching reading. Bloch gives an example of this:

In the SA situation... many teachers have not had access to the kind of information that would help them to recognise the significance of meaning and of purposeful social and cultural practice in literacy learning. They thus tend to prioritise texts which repeat the same phonically regular words and short sentences in the belief that this is what will provide the necessary tools for reading. (Bloch, 1996, p. 21)

Teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning in general are similarly influenced by their own school-years’ experience, and affect the teaching of reading in particular. Abadzi makes the point that “In some respects there is no such thing as an untrained teacher. Students extract teaching rules from the past behaviour of their own teachers. These may include absenteeism, inefficient use of time, rote memorisation, mistreatment of students, infrequent use of text books and expectations of low performance” (2006, p. 126).

The literature on teachers’ beliefs makes valuable comments on ways of investigating teacher’s beliefs and their relationship to classroom practice. It suggests that multimethod approaches, allowing for triangulation of data, are necessary to analyse teachers’ beliefs. Pajares (1992, p. 327) argues that belief inventories must be complemented by interviews, responses to dilemmas and observation of behaviour. These points were taken into consideration when designing this study (see Chapter 4).

Beliefs and values are often implicit (Poulson et al., 2001, p. 273) and are therefore difficult to access. A number of instruments have been developed to uncover teacher’s beliefs about reading, and in some cases to link these to practice. The most influential of these was a

survey instrument designed to determine teacher beliefs about practices in reading instruction in the USA, published by De Ford (1985). The Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) uses 28 questions to identify three broad theoretical perspectives on beginning reading: phonics (first focus on the sub-word, move on to fluency and comprehension only after letter-sound correspondence is well established), skills (develop an adequate sight vocabulary and skill in recognizing whole words; word attack skills are emphasised, introducing new words in context) and whole language (provide good literature, emphasise text and story, student's own writing and experience of shared reading). These theoretical perspectives were considered in detail in Section 2.2 and the role and emphasis on meaning in each perspective was clarified. It should be noted that the TORP instrument does not refer to the concept of a balanced approach to teaching reading, though some of the features of such an approach are included in the TORP's skills-perspective. The TORP instrument has been validated through multi-method analysis. It has been extensively used by other researchers in the US, Canada and the UK (e.g. Ketner, Smith, & Parnell, 1997; Mergendoller & Sacks, 1994; Poulson et al., 2001; Richards, Gipe, & Thompson, 1987).

Other instruments have been devised to assess teacher's beliefs about reading. Researchers in the UK modified the TORP instrument by choosing six items from the original TORP and rewriting further statements to represent the practical action a teacher would be likely to take if he/she had a particular orientation to reading and writing (Poulson et al., 2001, p. 276; Wray et al., 2000). This instrument was used in the present study. Other instruments are the Teacher's Beliefs about Literacy Questionnaire (TBALQ), developed in Australia (Westwood, Knight, & Redden, 1997), and the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOSS) (Lenski, Wham, & Griffey, 1998), which was designed to help teachers to examine their beliefs in the context of the ascendance of the constructivist paradigm.

2.5.2 Teachers' knowledge relevant to teaching reading

In the discussion of teacher's beliefs about reading above, it was indicated that the distinction between knowledge and belief is complex and problematic. Pajares says that knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, but new phenomena are interpreted through beliefs, and beliefs have a "filtering effect" on thought processes (1992, p. 325).

Teacher's knowledge has often been characterised by proxy measures such as number of degrees/diplomas/certificates completed (Phelps & Schilling, 2004), but the complex realities of education prove that tertiary education does not necessarily translate into improved instruction or achievement. Shulman (1986) argued that research into teacher's knowledge was a "missing paradigm" and stimulated an influential field of research in this direction. Shulman (1987) identified seven types of teacher knowledge: content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge; curriculum knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; knowledge of learners and their characteristics; knowledge of educational contexts; and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. Shulman did not examine the interactions between these categories of knowledge (Hashweh, 2005, p. 279).

Shulman focused on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) because it "identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching" (1987, p. 8). At the intersection of content (knowledge) and pedagogy, PCK is concerned with the transformation of content into forms that are pedagogically powerful (Shulman, 1987, p. 15). It "represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented ... adapted... and represented for instruction" (1987, p. 8). Teaching, according to Shulman is the transformation of content into pedagogical forms (1987, p. 15). Thus, from a practical perspective, PCK would have the reading teacher asking questions such as: What makes learning to read difficult? What misconceptions do students bring to learning reading, and how does the teacher re-organise the understanding of the student?

The concept of PCK has been variously criticised for being too narrow. Segall suggests a broader conception of PCK, one in which the teacher simultaneously "learn[s] how to make content instructional [and] examine[s] the instructional nature of content" (2004, p. 501). McCaughtry (2005) also suggests a broader conception of PCK, including an understanding of how teachers connect their knowledge of students with their pedagogy and curriculum. Hashweh proposes reconceptualisation of PCK as a collection of Teacher Pedagogical Constructions (TPCs) that "preserves the planning and wisdom of practice that the teacher acquires when repeatedly teaching a certain topic" (2005, p. 290). Kansanen (2009, p. 34), comparing the German concept of *Fachdidaktik* (subject-matter didactics) with PCK, also finds PCK too narrow in that it does not include the central process of how a school subject is created by transforming disciplinary content into classroom subject matter.

Hashweh (2005) usefully expands on Shulman's ideas on PCK by identifying seven characteristics of PCK:

1. It represents personal, private knowledge, which only becomes public through the researcher capturing and presenting it.
2. It is a collection of smaller knowledge units (called Teacher Pedagogical Constuctions).
3. It develops through experience, mainly the experience of repeatedly planning lessons and is therefore a *construction*. It does not seem to develop through traditional pre-service teacher education programmes (2005, p. 279). Hashweh also argues that teachers holding constructivist beliefs develop richer PCK than behaviourist teachers (2005, p. 287).
4. It is influenced by the interaction of various knowledge and belief categories
5. It embodies components of both event-based (linked to cognitive schema) and story-based (more episodic and emotional) memories.
6. It is topic specific.
7. It is labelled in multiple interesting ways that connect it to other teacher knowledge and beliefs.

Writers from a critical perspective challenge Shulman's idea that pedagogy is something that happens in classrooms only. For example, Bernstein (Bernstein, 1996 p. 17) sees pedagogy as "wider than the relationships that go on in schools", and emphasises that pedagogy can take place anywhere where cultural production and reproduction occurs. Secondly they challenge the idea that content and pedagogy can be separated. Giroux and Simon state that pedagogy "organises a view of, and specifies particular versions of what knowledge is of most worth, in what direction we should desire, what it means to know something and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and the world" (Giroux & Simon, 1988, p. 12). Lusted (1986/1992, p. 85, quoted in Segal, 2004, p. 494) says, "How one teaches is ... of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns," in other words pedagogy is not just a method applied to content but it is one with content.

The fact that content has pedagogical dimensions (Segal, 2004, p. 501) means also that the texts which contain this content are themselves not devoid of pedagogy. When students engage with texts, for example when children learning to read engage with the texts supplied

by the school for this purpose, they learn about the subject matter of the text but also about particular kinds of discourse, and constitute and regulate consciousness of self (Bernstein, 1996, p. 84). Segall argues that “representations of subject matter are pedagogical; they do not only tell students something about the world, they also position them to know of and be in the world in some ways rather than others” (Segall, 2004, p. 500). Thus a Foundation Phase teacher and the texts she uses in her teaching children to read, contribute to the kind of literate subject which learners become.

Not many studies have focused on identifying teacher content knowledge for teaching reading in schools. One example is Phelps and Schilling (2004) who found evidence that teachers of reading in the USA need knowledge about the structure of language and text as well knowledge about the reading process. It should be noted that perceptions relating to what teacher knowledge is needed are influenced by and related to the emphasis on high-stakes testing in US schools. The research supported the idea that teaching reading requires specialised knowledge of content (2004, p.43) and that knowledge of comprehension used in teaching is distinct from more common knowledge of reading (2004, p. 41). They identified the following as defining factors in content knowledge for teaching reading (clearly meaning teaching reading in English):

- Knowledge of antonyms and prefixes;
- Interpreting student reading to assess comprehension;
- Interpreting reading error rate to determine appropriate test difficulty;
- Interpreting student ideas about genre;
- Teaching students to use the structure of a word to understand word meaning;
- Knowledge of spelling regularity, phonemes and word frequency;
- Interpreting student spelling to assess phoneme knowledge and difficulties with spelling patterns;
- Interpreting student reading to assess why students misread particular words.

Spear-Swerling (2004) cites the work of several researchers who have found that developing teachers’ knowledge base about word structure and phonemic awareness improves learners’ phonemic awareness, reading and spelling. In addition, professional development initiatives which improve teacher’s comprehension and content learning improves these skills in their students (Spear-Swerling, 2004, p. 551).

Reflection by teachers is an important tool for enhancing knowledge about pedagogy. Risko et al. found that a major finding of research in this field is that teachers need “explicit guidance and focused instructional support to deepen reflective thinking” (2008, p. 266).

2.5.3 Effective reading teachers

There have been a number of productive approaches to researching the role of the reading teacher. One approach has been to examine what “effective” or “excellent” reading teachers do (Flynn, 2007; Hall & Harding, 2003; Topping & Ferguson, 2005; Wray et al., 2000). Some of these studies proceed from a positivist/behavioural paradigm and have produced lists of observable teacher behaviours and competencies (see Risko et al., 2008, p. 254). Others are more constructivist in approach, focusing on how teachers develop new knowledge in the context of prior experience and present contexts (e.g. Wray et al., 2000). This kind of study complements the research reported in the previous section about teacher knowledge.

Studies in the UK (Wray, 1998; Wray et al., 2000; Wray et al., 2002) have found that effective teachers of reading contextualise their teaching activities, starting with text and teaching grammar, phonics, spelling, and so on in the context of this text. They extensively model or demonstrate literate behaviour and thinking. They regularly read aloud to children and listen to children reading. They help children to make connections between text, sentences and words, using their knowledge of language. They ask children questions about how they made literacy decisions or what cues they used or what conclusions they are drawing. They encourage children to speak explicitly about their reading and writing. Effective teachers regularly focus children’s attention on the task at hand, set time limits, have a clear focus to their lessons with purposeful introductions and conclusions which review the learning accomplished. Overall, these effective teachers work from the basis that learning is a process of interaction between the known and the unknown, helping children to recognise and work from their existing knowledge. They recognise that learning is a social process and use group interaction as a teaching strategy. They recognise that learning is a situated process and ensure meaningful contexts for learning. Finally they promote the metalinguistic processes of learning.

While there are, to my knowledge, no studies about effective teachers of reading in South Africa, the findings reported above can reasonably be expected to apply in South Africa as well. However, since in mainstream South African schools there is typically a difference between the home language of students and teachers and the language of school instruction, unlike the situation in the UK, it can also be expected that additional factors would be identified in the mainstream South African context.

2.5.4 Teaching reading teachers

There is a deafening silence in the South African literature regarding the initial preparation or continuing development of reading teachers, particularly teachers in the Foundation Phase. This may well have to do with the status of early years teachers, and with the fact that until fairly recently they were not trained in Institutions of Higher Learning in which there is an emphasis on research and knowledge production. However, there have been several surveys of the preparation of teachers to teach reading in the US and the UK. Scrivens (1998) details three UK reports which noted that in England most Higher Education Institutions gave very little time to the preparation of teachers to teach reading, that there was a lack of connection between theory and practice in reading teacher education and that only 10% of reading teachers were satisfied with their initial training.

Hartse, Leyland, Schmidt, Vasquez and Ociepka (2004) set out to explore their observation that no matter how innovative a teacher training programme, many teachers “adopt practices that reflect those of mainstream practitioners, rather than those advocated by their teacher education courses.” This is an issue of great concern for teacher educators in South Africa as well, where classroom practice is invariably of the teacher-talk and rote and drill type, in spite of in-service and pre-service training to the contrary. Hartse et al. explain this observation in this way:

Most prospective teachers are not enrolled in a teacher education programme at all, but rather a hodgepodge of coursework from a hodgepodge of professors having a hodgepodge of theoretical orientations and are placed for practicum purposes in a hodgepodge of settings. The only clear bet is that what student teachers believe and what their supervising teachers believe about teaching and learning will differ. (Hartse et al., 2004, no pagination)

They go on to argue that it is crucial that teachers should learn to operate consistently out of a theory of reading. Their research showed that teachers who can theoretically justify their practice are more likely to accomplish change, while teachers who do not fully understand the relationship between theory and practice are more likely to “get sucked into doing school as it has always been done”. This is important for South Africans considering the legacy of Bantu Education. Their solution to this problem is for teacher educators themselves to be explicit about their own beliefs about teaching and learning, and for students to have the opportunity to observe these theories in action in the classroom.

Hoffman and Pearson (2000) distinguish between training and teaching of reading teachers. Training is about the direct actions of a teacher to enhance automatic behaviour (i.e. skills) whereas teaching is about intentional action of a teacher to “promote personal control over and responsibility for learning” (2000, p. 32). They argue that:

Your granddaughter’s teacher will teach in a classroom quite different from the one she or he attended. There are few assumptions about that classroom of the future that we can use to extract a training mode. We subscribe to van Manan’s standard that ‘to be fit for teaching is to be able to handle change.’ (Hoffman & Pearson, 2000, p. 42)

They admit that training models are attractive because they show results, are cheap and efficient, supply teachers faster, can be easily communicated to the public and result in conformity of practice, but argue that:

[Training] will not help teachers develop the personal and professional commitment to lifelong learning required by those who want to confront the complexities and contradictions of teaching. (Hoffman & Pearson, 2000, p. 37)

They conclude that training should be situated within a broader vision of teaching and teacher learning.

Similarly the International Reading Association (IRA)’s Commission on Reading Teacher Education argued that “competency-based” programmes and programmes that deliver a lot of content in lectures “do not promote engagement in any deep sense of learning or preparing students to use, adapt and transform professional knowledge” (International Reading Association, 2003, p. 4). The IRA Commission argued that student teachers should be placed for field experience with effective role models who share the philosophy of the teacher training programme. This investigation into 1150 teacher preparation programs in the USA found “tremendous variation” in the content, timing, and experiences provided in teacher

education programs relating to reading. The IRA investigation singled out the following 8 critical features of excellence in reading teacher programmes (International Reading Association, 2003):

- **Content:** a comprehensive curriculum is needed for teachers to develop a comprehensive knowledge base and be able to make effective decisions in the classroom.
- **Apprenticeship:** a variety of course-related field experiences should be provided and student teachers should have the opportunity to interact with excellent mentors and models.
- **Vision:** teacher educators should construct their programmes around a vision of quality literacy and teacher education.
- **Resources and mission:** the teacher education programme needs to have sufficient intellectual, financial and professional resources to support quality teacher education.
- **Personalised:** teacher educators must be responsive to diversity.
- **Autonomy:** teacher educators need to adapt and negotiate with institutions so that students receive the most effective training.
- **Community effectivity:** teacher educators work to create an active learning community.
- **Assessment:** teacher educators continually assess themselves as well as their students to guide their practice.

The IRA's Commission on Reading Teacher Education's major criticism of reading teacher education relates to lack of comprehensive content. The IRA suggests that at a minimum the reading teacher programme should cover:

- Early literacy, including oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, word identification;
- Vocabulary, fluency and comprehension;
- Assessing all aspects of literacy learning;
- Organising and managing literacy instruction across the grades.

However, the IRA argues that knowledge of this content is not sufficient:

[Effective reading teacher programmes] adopt a pedagogy that encourages students in learning how to transform knowledge into action – i.e. students must be able to manipulate and make decisions about knowledge to fit the needs of particular students or situation. (International Reading Association, 2003, p. 2)

The report suggests that this is possible in programmes that organise knowledge into broad principles that students revisit repeatedly, have assessment driven instruction, offer explicit instruction and provide models of practice.

The IRA commission argued that student teachers should be presented with a coherent understanding of literacy which they can take into the workplace, and that undergraduates should not be left to make sense of competing visions of literacy. At the former University of Natal, the Language in Literacy Teaching (LILT) course offered to student teachers in the 1990s corroborated this recommendation. In this course, learners were presented with written accounts of two views of reading, a bottom-up approach and a top-down approach. Academic staff who taught the course recounted that when asked to present their view of the reading process, virtually every student recounted the bottom-up approach, despite the fact that the course materials were clearly in favour of the other approach (Personal communication with Carol Thomson, 2005).

In 2008 a critical analysis of research on reading teacher education in the USA, based on 82 empirical investigations, was published (Risko *et al.*, 2008). This study identified that changes in beliefs and pedagogical knowledge are possible for teachers; that teacher education programmes have greatest impact when theory and practice are linked, including through guided practice of teaching strategies in practicum settings; and that demonstration (modelling) of practices is key. The study supported explicit teaching of teachers, including explicit explanation, use of examples, modelling, practice within the university classroom and practice in field settings, though it cautioned that teacher educators should be assessing on an ongoing basis whether this kind of explicit instruction is leading, as it should, to construction of knowledge for problem-solving, as opposed to merely technical knowledge (2008, p. 277). The Risko study also highlighted the positive effects of getting trainee teachers to examine their own personal use of reading strategies, their own literacy development and their own beliefs about teaching reading (2008, p. 277) as well as the positive effect of collaborative learning in teacher training programmes.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This Chapter outlined theoretical and research precedents to aspects of this study. In Section 2.2, I set out four broad theoretical perspectives on the reading process, identifying how meaning is positioned in each of these theories and noting the broad implications of each perspective for the teaching of reading and the teaching of early reading in particular. The data collected in this study will be analysed, in Chapter 5, in terms of these theoretical

understandings. Section 2.3 focused more specifically on the issue of teaching reading for meaning, a key concern of the study, detailing research on five aspects of the teaching of reading which I consider important in teaching reading for meaning. These aspects are comprehension instruction, vocabulary and knowledge development, fluency, the literacy environment, the importance of metalinguistic awareness and the reading-writing connection. Again, this provides important background for the analysis of data collected in this study. Section 2.4 focused on six current issues or debates in the teaching of beginning reading in schools which provide a richer understanding of the issues faced by the schooling system in general and the teachers in this study in particular. Finally, Section 2.5 focused on literature regarding the reading teacher, the focus of this case study. Literature reviewed in this section asserts that teachers are crucial in the pedagogic process and that their beliefs, often developed through their own schooling, may be both resistant to change and influential in teacher decision-making, despite education. I argued that teacher knowledge of the reading process and of how to help children learn this process is critical, though still relatively undefined, and that teacher education which assists the teacher to make appropriate decisions in various contexts is of key importance. In order to enable change in beliefs about reading, teacher education needs to be multifaceted, involve clear modelling of practice linked to theory and require deep personal reflection and metacognition.

The next chapter hones in on literature regarding the teaching of reading in Foundation Phase classrooms in South Africa, describing student reading performance, and typical explanations of this performance in research literature. Thus Chapter 3 situates the present case study in its policy and social context.

Chapter 3: Literature on Teaching Early Reading in South Africa

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having set out, in the previous chapter, broad theoretical considerations regarding the process of reading and the teaching of reading for meaning, as well as having addressed some crucial applied issues in this regard, I now narrow the focus of the literature review for this dissertation to research on reading in South Africa. First, in Section 3.2, I present details to support the assertion made in Chapter 1 that there is a crisis in early reading teaching and learning in South Africa, including massive inequalities in educational provision. Thereafter, in Section 3.3, I present an overview of peer-reviewed research regarding reading in the first three years of school in South Africa. In Section 3.4, six specific factors raised in this research as contributing to poor reading performance are discussed in more detail. These factors are socio-economic factors, the curriculum policy, the language of instruction, access to reading materials, whole school factors and classroom practice. I will argue that relatively little attention has been paid in existing research to the *pedagogy* of reading teaching in the first three years at school. The present study begins to redress this imbalance.

3.2 EVIDENCE OF POOR READING ACHIEVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Cook-Gumperz (2006, p. 1) argues that “Literacy rates have served as a barometer of society such that illiteracy takes on symbolic significance, reflecting any disappointment not only with the workings of the educational system but with the society itself.” This is one reason for the disquiet over reports of poor reading achievement in South Africa and elsewhere. Further reasons relate to the commonly held perception that literacy leads to social and economic development and improved quality of life.

Information about levels of literacy in South Africa comes from two sorts of sources. Most commonly cited are statistical data relating to standardised testing at school. These tests should not be considered uncritically. However, the general tenor of their findings, which

point to serious and skewed weaknesses in literacy achievement, is borne out quite clearly by the other source of information, namely anecdotal accounts from educators at all levels, which, while often not “scientifically” documented, are nonetheless significant.

Most people acquire their literacy skills in school (UNESCO, 2006, p. 2). Under-achievement in literacy in both children and adults is mutually reinforcing of failure (Aitchison & Harley, 2006, p. 2) and I begin by considering research regarding adult literacy levels in South Africa. Seminal research regarding the extent of adult illiteracy in South Africa has been done by the University of Natal (later merged into the University of KwaZulu-Natal). Two important difficulties have been experienced in deriving figures on adult literacy: how literacy/illiteracy is defined; and the sources of data used. Aitchison and Harley (2006) compared different data sources regarding the extent of adult literacy, using various definitions of literacy and, as Table 1

Table 1 shows, whichever way one looks at the problem, it is not going away.

Table 1: Levels of education of South Africans aged 15 and over
(Source: Aitchison & Harley, 2006, p. 91)

Level of education of citizens older than 15 years	1995 October Household Survey	1996 General Population Census	2001 General Population Census
Full general education (Grade 9 and more)	14.3 million (54%)	13.1 million (50%)	15.8 million (52%)
Less than full general education (less than Grade 9)	12.2 million (46%)	13.2 million (50%)	14.6 million (48%)
<i>Less than Grade 7</i>	<i>7.4 million (28%)</i>	<i>8.5 million (32%)</i>	<i>9.6 million (32%)</i>
No schooling	2.9 million (11%)	4.2 million (16%)	4.7 million (16%)

Of particular interest is the second last row in Table 1 (given in italics). Grade 7 is often regarded as the level at which a person becomes sustainably and functionally literate (Aitchison & Harley, 2006, p. 90). From an idealistic perspective, it is reasonable to suggest that since it has been compulsory for South Africans under the age of 15 to attend school since 1991, the increasing percentage and raw number of people who are functionally illiterate, as suggested by the figures in the “less than Grade 7” row, can be ascribed at least

in part to the failure of the school system to adequately develop their literacy skills. From a more realistic standpoint, the thousands of children who, in spite of the provisions of the law simply do not go to school or who drop out have also been failed by the school system, and it is highly likely that many of those who drop out have experienced failure in literacy at school.

Three separate large-scale studies into literacy and numeracy performance at school level in South Africa provide evidence of the extent of failure in literacy at school at the Grade 6 level. Research conducted by the National Department of Education (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2005), the Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II) project (Mothibeli, 2005) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007), all argue that in the region of half the Grade 6 pupils in South Africa are unable to read at the expected level. In all these research projects, experienced teachers were involved in determining, on the basis of curricula, what the learners were expected to be able to do at different grade levels. It is not known whether similar benchmark standards were used in these different studies to define these “grade levels”.

The SACMEQ II project, conducted from 2000-2003 (<http://www.sacmeq.org>; Moloi & Strauss, 2005; Mothibeli, 2005), provides detailed information on the mathematics and reading achievement of 42 000 learners in 2 250 schools in 14 sub-Saharan countries. The research was conducted using learner, teacher and principal questionnaires and learner and teacher tests for literacy and numeracy. Various measures were taken to ensure that the items in the tests correlated with the school curricula, but it should be noted that the language used in the instructions and test items was English (the language of instruction), and that the questionnaires specifically investigated the teaching of English. The data was presented in various ways, all of which suggest the poor performance of South African students, despite the relative economic richness of the country. In the reading test, the mean scores of South African students placed the country 9th out of the 14 African countries, better than Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zanzibar, but falling behind Uganda, Mozambique, Botswana, Swaziland, Tanzania, Mauritius, Kenya and Seychelles in that order (Mothibeli, 2005, p. 3). Expert committees then judged the minimum levels they would expect learners to attain in order to cope in Grade 7, and the desirable levels. On this analysis, 36,7% of South African

Grade 6 students met the minimum requirements, and 19, 1% the desired level of mastery. It is important to note that in South Africa there were very high variations in student's scores – a lot of very poor results, combined with a number of very good results. Mothibeli concludes: “The question for all interested in the development of education in the region is how it can happen that learners can get to Grade 6 and still be semi-literate?” (2005, p. 7)

Using a scaling model which clustered test items in terms of the specific skills required to answer each item and then ranking these skills in terms of eight levels of literacy competency, it was revealed that 50% of South African students in Grade 6 were in fact unable to read beyond a very basic level, as Table 2 below shows. According to SAQMEC II, 50% of South African students and 40% of students in all the 14 countries were only able to interpret meaning in short, simple sentences, and were not able to interpret information from different parts of a text, combine this information, contextualise it, infer, analyse or think critically about the meaning of what they read. On the other end of the spectrum, however, in South Africa almost double the number of students were able to read critically than in the other participating countries. This points again to the pockets of excellence and the disparities in education described in Chapter 1.

The SACMEQ level descriptors shown in Table 2 on the next page are very different from the “Reading Steps” defined in the South African National Reading Strategy reported earlier in Figure 7. It is notable that right from the emergent reading stage in the SAQMEC scale, students are expected to make use of more than one cueing system and word attack strategy (sounding out, use of sentence structure and familiar words, reading on and reading back were all tested by SAQMEC) and interpreting of text is seen to require such skills. However, the South African Reading Strategy mentions only sounding out, using a dictionary, recognising words by sight and making informed guesses as word identification strategies. At level 8 it does say the student should be able to “use different reading strategies to make informed guesses about new words” (South Africa, National Department of Education, 2008, p.20) but these strategies are not specified. This comparison raises the question of whether South African teachers are aware of and teach the kinds of skills tested by SAQMEC.

Table 2: Grade 6 Learner skills levels for the SACMEQ II reading tests, showing South African percentages and average for 14 Sub-Saharan African countries

(Constructed from Mothibeli, 2005; composite of tables 3(a) and 4, pp.4 & 6)

Reading level	Descriptor	South African percentage	Average percentage for 14 countries
1	Pre-reading: Matches words and pictures involving concrete concepts and everyday objects. Follows short simple written instructions	12,2%	6,7%
2	Emergent reading: Matches words and pictures involving prepositions and abstract concepts: uses cuing systems (by sounding out, using simple sentence structure and familiar words) to interpret phrases by reading on.	18.8%	14.9%
3	Basic reading: Interprets meaning (by matching words and phrases, completing a sentence, or matching adjacent words) in a short and simple text by reading on or reading back.	19.1%	18.4%
4	Reading for meaning: reads on or reads back in order to link and interpret information located at various parts of the text	16.0%	20.3%
5	Interpretive reading: reads on and reads back in order to combine and interpret information from various parts of the text in association with external information (based on recalled factual knowledge) that 'completes' and contextualises meaning	9.4%	16.8%
6	Inferential reading: reads on and reads back through longer texts (narrative, document or expository) in order to combine information from various parts of the text so as to infer the writer's purpose	7.0%	10.7%
7	Analytical reading: locates information in longer texts (narrative, document or expository) by reading on and reading back in order to combine information from various parts of the text so as to infer the writer's personal beliefs (value systems, prejudices and/or biases)	10.9%	8.4%
8	Critical Reading: Locates information in longer texts (narrative, document or expository) by reading on and reading back in order to combine information from various parts of the text so as to infer and evaluate what the writer has assumed about the topic and the characteristics of the reader –such as age, knowledge and personal beliefs (value systems, prejudices and/or biases)	6.6%	3.8%

An interesting component of the SACMEQ tests was that teachers were also tested and placed on the same scale. It was found that on average they scored only 2- 2,5 standard deviations above their pupils (Postlethwaite, 2004, p. 12). This would mean that in South Africa, most teachers themselves would not be inferential, analytical or critical readers.

The National Department of Education conducted “National Systemic Evaluations” of learners across the country in Grade 3 (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003a) and Grade 6 (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2005). The actual instruments used in these evaluations have not been made public and although I have not come across critiques of the instruments or their application, I believe questions should be asked regarding who determined the “expected grade level” of reading, and on what basis this was defined. The general trend in the evaluation results is very similar to the findings of the SACMEQII: the Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation reported that 63% of learners nationwide did **not** achieve the expected standards for Grade 6 in the language of learning and teaching, while only 28% performed at the “achieved” or “outstanding” levels (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2005, pp. 75-77). In KwaZulu-Natal 68% did not achieve the required standard, 7% partially achieved it, 10% achieved it and 15% received an outstanding result (2005, p. 78). Learners in urban and township areas performed substantially better than learners in rural and deep rural locations. Predictably, the research showed that those whose home language was different from the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) performed far worse than those who were studying in their home language. Learners did far better on multiple-choice type questions which require recognition, than on open ended questions which required considered opinions to be presented in paragraphs constructed by the reader. The average achievement in Language for learners of high socio-economic status was three times higher than for those from low socio-economic backgrounds (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2005, p. 99).

The Grade 6 report echoed the general findings of the similar national evaluation of Grade 3 learners which reported that only 47,2% of children were able to read at the expected level for Grade 3 (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003a). In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the mean result for literacy was 45% (South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, 2003, p. 49). A provincial average of 58% of learners had access to learning and teaching materials at school, and learners in schools which had greater access to materials achieved the best results. Learners obtained higher scores for reading tasks than for writing tasks (South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, 2003, p. 54). The study found an uneven influence of home language on learner scores.

The pass rate in KZN in the Foundation Phase was below the national average, at 80,7% (the national average was 83,3%). The survival rate (the number of learners in Grade 3 expressed

as a percentage of the learners in that cohort who started Grade 1) was 78,5% in KwaZulu-Natal (81,8% nationally) (South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, 2003, p. 24). This figure indicates that in KZN, 21,5% of learners who enrolled in Grade 1 did not complete Grade 3 after three years. The Systemic Evaluation Report does not provide raw data as to how many learners repeated school grades in the Foundation Phase, but does show that in KZN it takes an average of 2,4 years for a learner to complete the first two grades at school and an average of 3,4 years for a learner to get through Grade 3 (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003a, pp. 18-19). Note that the policy of the Department of Education is that a learner may not repeat more than one grade in a phase. From these figures it can be seen that there is a fairly high rate of repetition in the first three years at school, or alternatively learners were actually dropping out of school during the Foundation Phase, despite the policy of compulsory education for all.

This is corroborated by Liddel and Rae who estimate that in South Africa more than a million primary school children repeat classes each year (2001, p. 414). Two longitudinal studies of student progress in primary schools in South Africa have been reported: Motala (1995) and Liddel and Rae (2001). Liddel and Rae followed a cohort of children from 1994 to 1998, investigating their academic progress from enrolment in Grade 2 to their completion of Grade 6. Their study found that in 77% of cases, the greatest predictor of survival without repetition in the school system were student's academic results in Grade 1 (2001, p. 423). Socio-economic background and caregiver education, were found to be only moderately associated with survival in school, while sex and nutritional status were found to be neither predictive nor explanatory. In other words, "doing well in a developing world school has less to do with a child's background or personal qualities than it has to do with the in-school experience itself" (Liddle & Rae, 2001, p. 425). The study, however, did not identify the real sources of difficulties experienced by children in Grade 1, which further justifies the present study's focus on what happens in Grade 1 classrooms in South Africa.

At the time of this research, the Western Cape was the only province which conducted its own regular "systemic evaluations" of learners, using the data to assess progress and linking information back to particular schools and particular skills. The Western Cape Education Department (WECD) undertook its first major study of Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy performance in 2002 and the following year introduced strategies including teacher training and materials development designed to improve results within a five year period. The studies

of Grade 3 pupils showed that 13,1% of Grade 3 pupils could not even read and write at Grade 1 level, and 62,7% could only manage Grade 2 level work (South Africa. Western Cape Education Department, 24 May 2005). In effect this means that the Grade 3 pupils were performing two grades below their expected level.

The 2004 WCED study disaggregated the results of their evaluations according to apartheid-era education departments indicating that very large differences in achievement are being experienced by different types of schools in the province. It found that at Grade 3 level, 66,5% of pupils in apartheid-era Department of Education and Training (“black”) schools passed, whereas 97% of pupils at former Cape Education Department (“white”) schools passed, and 81,5% of pupils in former House of Representatives (“coloured”) schools passed (Fleisch, 2008, p. 8). What is more, from 2003 to 2004 the Grade 6 literacy pass rate improved by only 1% to 4.7% in former Department of Education and Training schools (Fleisch, 2008, p. 9) and at Grade 4 level achievement rates actually fell (2008, p.10).

In 2006 the *Progress in International Reading Study* (PIRLS), Mullis et al. (2007) assessed more than 30 000 South African Grade 4 and 5 learners, along with learners from 39 other countries. The instruments were translated into all 11 South African official languages and students were tested in both their home language and in English as second (additional) language. The South African learners achieved the lowest mean scores of all participating countries, and their mean performance at Grade 4 level was 302 points, compared to the international mean of 500 points (Long & Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman, Howie, & du Toit, 2008). According to this study, nearly 25% of Grade 5 learners in South Africa achieved the lowest international benchmark, whereas in the full study 94% of learners one school year below this, in Grade 4, achieved this benchmark. Results showed that only 3% of South African Grade 4 students achieved the “High international benchmark”, in which they could retrieve significant details embedded across the text, make inferences, integrate ideas and information, and use organisational features of text to find their way around informational text (Zimmerman et al., 2008, p. 2). Significantly, none of the learners who took the test in an African home language achieved this level, or the “Advanced International Benchmark”. The release of these results prompted the National Department of Education to decline participation in the next PIRLS study and to formulate a “Foundations for Learning

Campaign” in 2008. This is outside the timeframe of this study and will not be considered further here.

Unlike the SACMEQ study, the PIRLS study included the collection of a range of background information about learners’ home and school environments, including specific information about the structure and content of reading instruction. This demonstrated at a large-scale level many of the trends which this present study highlights at a micro level. For example, the PIRLS data confirmed that lower-level decoding strategies are dominant during the Foundation Phase of schooling in South Africa, despite the emphasis in the curriculum on a balanced approach to reading. At Grade 1 level, knowing letters, knowing letter-sound relationships and reading words were the major emphasis. The PIRLS data showed that reading connected text as opposed to isolated sentences began at Grade 2 level in 34% of the South African school sample and at Grade 3 level in another 30% of the sample. However, more complex strategies such as identifying the main idea of text, explaining or supporting understanding of text, comparing text with personal experience, comparing different texts and making predictions about what will happen next were in most cases only introduced at Grade 4 level, while making generalisations and inferences and describing the text structure and style are not taught at all in the first 4 years of schooling (Long & Zimmerman, 2008, p. 7). Significantly, the PIRLS data supported the early introduction of complex reading strategies: learners who were first introduced to any of the more complex reading skills (with the exception of describing text style and structure) at Grade 1 level achieved higher points than those who first encountered such skills in later grades (Long & Zimmerman, 2008, p. 7).

The PIRLS 2006 data offers another important insight for the present study. The PIRLS questionnaire enabled the construction of indices of student’s own concept of themselves as readers, as well as the collection of data regarding their attitudes to reading. This is of relevance to the concept of the literate subject which is developed in this thesis. PIRLS found that 31% of South African Grade 4 learners tested had a high “student’s reading self-concept”, 64% had a medium self concept and only 4% saw themselves as poor readers (Mullis, Martin, Martin, & Foy, 2007, p. 144). This corresponds roughly with how students report enjoying reading – 33% attained a high “Attitude towards reading” score, 60 % a medium score and 4% a low score (Mullis, et al., 2007, p. 141). Thus, while experts judge the South African children as poor readers, the children do not perceive themselves as such.

However, the PIRLS report produced a startling set of results regarding children's reading patterns, which begs the question of how honest children were in reporting their activities in the survey. South Africans topped the list in the world of students reading for information out of school hours, with 36% reporting doing so daily, 45% reporting once or twice a week, 16% once or twice a month and only 3% never (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy et al., 2007, pp. 150-151). 45% said they read for fun outside of school (from whatever source) on a daily basis, 26% once or twice a week, and 28% twice a month or less (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy et al., 2007, p. 155).

Before continuing it is important to note that standardised tests of literacy have been the subject of rigorous critique. For example, Bartlett (2007), working from a social-practices perspective, argues that standardised literacy tests:

- Treat literacy as the property of individual cognition;
- Assume that literacy tasks can be extracted from social and cultural contexts and that they have the same meaning across individuals and groups;
- Prioritise form over meaning and assume a stable linkage between skill and text;
- Assume universal, cross-linguistic and cross-contextual skills are used in reading. However, work on second language acquisition suggests that, although many reading skills transfer from one language to another, different orthographies and language require different skills, particularly phonic skills;
- Assume that literacy is objectively measurable. However, the tests are inherently political and do not relate to ability to perform tasks in everyday lives.

In spite of such criticisms, seen together, these studies confirm that there is a problem of literacy achievement in the early years of school. As Crain Soudien argues, "The system, it should be boldly acknowledged, is not working for the majority of South Africa's children" (2007, p.188).

This has major ramifications for achievement at secondary school and at tertiary level. Clark and Linder (2006), in a book about teaching mathematics and science in a Western Cape FET College, describe the effects of the "invisible barrier" of weak reading skills which result in students becoming "locked out of the test". Students tend to read only at word level and

struggle to extract the meaning of the whole sentence. The result is that “students are trapped by their weak L2 [second language] skills in a continuing dependency relationship with their teacher” (J. Clark & Linder, 2006, p. 115). University of KwaZulu-Natal staff members report informally that many students even at post-graduate level have great difficulty making meaning from text, and that this inhibits their ability to learn and to represent what they learn in writing.

A study of first year UNISA sociology and psychology students conducted by E.J. Pretorius investigated students’ comprehension and reading speed. Most students were found to be reading below the recommended reading speed of 140-160 wpm for L2 students, which is 30% slower than first language (L1) learners (E.J. Pretorius, 2000, p. 8). Statistical analysis of examination scores showed that reading inference, a key component of comprehension, was the strongest predictor of academic performance out of eight variables including living conditions, study habits, attitude to content work, perceived usefulness of course and locus of control, but the mean inferencing score for the students studied was 53.8% (E.J. Pretorius, 2000, p.7). The study found that many students were reading at frustration level (i.e. 90% or less accuracy of word recognition and 50% or less comprehension).

Students with reading problems get caught in a negative cycle of failed reading outcomes and non-strategic reading styles, and if they are reading at frustration level and have to deal with texts well above their reading ability level, then leaving them to their own devices in the hope that problems will sort themselves out amounts to an abdication of educational responsibility. (E.J. Pretorius, 2000, p. 10)

In a later study, Pretorius (2002) reports a range of statistics from tertiary institutions on reading skills - the picture is very bleak, with low reading speeds and poor comprehension.

Bertram (2006) studied the reading competences of teachers enrolled in a postgraduate programme of study. In agreement with Pretorius’ results, she found that more than a third of students were reading the course materials at frustration level and that this was strongly linked to the home language of the students. More surprisingly, Bertram found that neither teachers’ previous qualifications, nor the phase of the education system in which they teach are statistically significant in the reading competence of teachers: “It appears ...that there are other more individual factors that impact on a teacher’s reading competence, such as her literacy practices or educational background and competence” (2006, p. 13) .

From the literature reviewed above it is clear that reading achievement in general in South Africa is of a lower level than would be expected at various stages throughout the education system. It is of particular interest, however that these results are not uniform across the country. For example, Fleisch's analysis of the SACMEQ II data shows that a small number of schools have consistently high average reading scores while for the vast majority the raw scores are very low (Fleisch, 2007, pp.20-21). In South Africa, as elsewhere, there is evidence that socio-economic status correlates strongly with differences in literacy achievement.

This section has established that there is indeed a problem in South Africa regarding the number of people who are recognised as literate. Next, some explanations for this situation will be briefly presented, and the relatively little existing research regarding school-level dynamics of literacy learning will be reviewed. The rest of the dissertation will focus on revealing the contribution that classroom practice makes towards this problem. In particular, I will pick up in later chapters the theme of reading for meaning, highlighted as an area of weak performance by the SACMEQ II study.

3.3 AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON INITIAL READING IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

In this section I summarise literature published between 2000 and 2008 in peer-reviewed journals which deals with the learning and teaching of reading in the first 4 years of formal schooling in South Africa. These articles were identified through searches of databases of educational journals, and while I attempted to be thorough in this search, I do not claim that my literature search was fully comprehensive. I did not consider book chapters, unpublished papers or dissertations. This review reveals large gaps in South African research about this crucial level of schooling. The studies considered are first summarised in Table 3. Thereafter some of the major foci of these studies are drawn and discussed. In Table 3, a typology has been developed to record the theoretical view of reading espoused by each writer, the key questions investigated, the method of investigation, the nature of the sample investigated and conclusions drawn.

Table 3: Summary of South African research on Foundation Phase reading

(Criteria for selection: Published in peer-reviewed journal 2000-2008; deal with reading, in Grades R-3, in South Africa.)

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Viljoen, C.F. Molefe, R.N.L. (RAU)	2001	<i>South African Journal of Education</i> Language related problems of limited English proficiency learners in Grade 1.	Qualitative , inductive analysis of data. Focus group interviews; individual interview with learners and teachers Extended observation; Projective technique based on photos of learners in uniform – in vernacular.	No single theory of 2 nd language learning. Language learning occurs in an interactionist context and process. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979): recognises indivisibility of individual, family and socio-cultural context.	9 learners, teachers & parents. Purposive sampling.	What emotional and behavioural problems are experienced by limited English proficiency learners, who enter Grade 1 in a multicultural school where the language of instruction is English?	Frustration, being overwhelmed, fearfulness and anxiety, lack of understanding, aggression/anger identified by parents, teachers and learners. Teachers & parents also identify lying, enuresis, swearing and bullying; Learners are unhappy. Learner's stress exacerbated by parental pressure to learn English quickly.
Bloch, C (UCT)	2002	<i>Perspectives in Education</i> A case study of Xhosa and English biliteracy in the Foundation Phase versus English as a 'medium of destruction'	Report on a Multilingual Demonstration School	Meaningful literacy; simultaneous exposure to English and isiXhosa; encourage risk taking and meaning making	One Grade 3 class (46 children) in an English-medium school in Cape Town in which most of the learners speak isiXhosa at home	How can Xhosa be brought into an English-medium school as a language of learning and as an additional language?	For Xhosa speaking children using Xhosa brought gains in both English and Xhosa. The greatest gain for English-speaking learners was positive attitude towards Xhosa speakers and the language.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Lessing, A.C. De Wit, M.W. (UNISA, education studies ; teacher education)	2002	<i>Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig</i> Teaching reading in an OBE framework.	Quantitative: Questionnaire With both closed and open questions	Balanced reading programme (phonic and whole word) Propose thematic “integrated” (all 4 modes) teaching of reading.	Gauteng 93 respondents, 52.7% FP.	Did a workshop on teaching reading in OBE framework fulfil needs of and empower teacher?	Need for further training of FP teachers; The more experienced the teacher the more valuable the training.
Pretorius, E. Naude, H. (UP; Anatomy, Ed Psych)	2002	<i>Early Childhood Development and Care</i> A culture in transition: poor reading and writing ability among children in South African Townships.	Quantitative Administration of test to determine literacy level of school beginners; (Test for knowledge of books, knowledge of print, knowledge of rhymes, songs and stories; phoneme sense, lexical sense, syntax sense; motivation/attitude; pre-writing proficiency. Tests in Tswana (L1)	Clay (1972) and Wells (1986) ie emergent literacy framework	N=30 5 ½ - 7 year olds, 5 from each of 6 daycare facilities in Temba informal settlement in Gauteng.	To determine levels of experience regarding reading and writing of a group of black preschool children. Hypothesis is lack of exposure and knowledge of written material and lack of parental involvement in early reading and writing activities results in poor subsequent performance in formal ed.	Children had adequate gestalt; Poor knowledge of sounds, literate behaviour, phonemic awareness, visual-motor integration, visual analysis and synthesis, poor fine motor development; inadequate exposure to literate activity. Gap between rural home culture and school culture in townships is enormous. See it as 1 st /3 rd world culture clash in the context of migration. Solution is to motivate parental involvement in preschool education and provision of additional material to preschools to be used at home with parents.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Macdonald, C.A. (Wits, Education)	2002	<i>Language Matters</i> Are the children still swimming up the waterfall? A look at literacy development in the new curriculum.	Expository critique of C2005	Meaning construction must be foregrounded in children's reading activities.	None	Are children, especially black children able to learn more meaningfully under the C2005 than previously? What support does the C2005 give to language development and literacy skills in the early years of schooling?	C2005 is "technicism run riot... detracts from the main aim in the education of small children, namely , developing and nurturing the creation of meaning at the very earliest of levels" (117); Early literacy processes entirely ignored; Critique of notion of unit standards; Go back to the drawing board!
Rodseth, V. (Molteno Project)	2002	<i>Perspectives in Education</i> Developing main language instruction. Developments in The Molteno Project – literacy, language and educator development.	Report on successes of Molteno Project	Language as a means to construct an understanding of the world. Uses language experience in Gr 1. Mother-tongue favoured.	The Molteno Project	What were the successes of the Molteno Project?	Molteno project was very successful in whole of Africa, but rejected by DOE as "not OBE compliant"

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Du Plessis, E. Naude, H. Viljoen, J. (UP)	2003	<i>Educare</i> A conceptual framework for accelerating emergent literacy skills of disadvantaged pre-schoolers in South Africa.	Expository	Emergent literacy Special-education needs perspective; Draws on Vygotsky.	None	To develop a framework for intervention in pre-schools for children at risk of developing special needs due to poverty and “educational neglect.”	Argues for intervention at Gr R level. Intervention should involve teacher management, frequent reinforcement, wealth of resources, wide range of genres; educational support services should focus on prevention rather than cure.
Broom, Y. (Wits, Human and community development)	2004	<i>Bilingual Education and Bilingualism</i> Reading English in multilingual South African primary schools.	Quasi-experimental- design and administration of test of reading proficiency at end of Grade 3.	Focus on language in education policy . Perspective on reading not specified, but draws on Cummins CALP and BICS	1999 N=845 Grade 3 learners in 20 schools in Gauteng.	To test hypothesis that there would be differences in the levels of English reading skills of learners attending schools formerly administered by the different Departments of Education, and that these differences would relate to the learner’s home language (L1) and LOLT. To provide a baseline for future monitoring of effects of LIEP	Wide range of language experience and ability in same classroom and between different schools. Pupils in Ex-DET schools uniformly performed below others L2 English learners performed below L1 peers – suggests that early transition to LOLT may be perpetuating inequalities.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Prinsloo, M. Steyn, P (UCT, Wits, Education)	2004	<i>Perspectives in Education</i> What's inside the box? Children's early literacy encounters with literacy in SA classroom.	Qualitative-ethnographic observation of classroom interaction	Emergent literacy NLS, Lit as social practice	Western Cape/ Gauteng 3 ECD sites, 1 GR 1 classroom	What is the nature of children's early encounters with literacy and implications for later development as readers and writers?	Different pedagogies send out different messages about literacy; most effective to work with indigenous knowledge in combination with academic and critical literacy
Pretorius, E.J. Machet, M.P. (UNISA, Linguistics & Info.science)	2004	<i>Africa Education Review</i> Literacy and disadvantage: learners' achievements in the early primary school years.	Quasi-experimental Intervention: provision of school book-based activities. Pre and post test after 1 year at Gr 1 & 4, with control group. Assessment of literacy skills in Gr 1 (Zulu) and Grade 4 (Zulu and English) compared with those not on the programme.	Not explicit, probably integrated? Decoding is necessary but insufficient – reading ability is only developed through exposure to meaningful activities involving reading. Strong predictor of literacy success at school is involvement with book-based activities, esp. shared story-book reading.	Family literacy Project, KZN. 2002 N=75 in 5 schools	Did after-school book-based enrichment programme have an effect on literacy development of learners?	Intervention at Gr1 produced performance gains on 5 out of 11 measures compared to control – all these gains were in tasks where learners are directly involved in reading. At Gr 4 level – levelling off effect: Gains were made on 3 out of 5 measures- gain in English word recognition but not in comprehension in extended discourse. Despite gains, performance still below optimal maturation level; Weakest results in schools with fewest material and literacy resources and poorest management.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Pretorius, E.J. Machet, M.P. (UNISA, Linguistics & Info. Science)	2004	<i>Journal of Language Teaching</i> The socio-educational context of literacy accomplishment in disadvantaged schools: lessons for reading in the early primary school years.	Observations of schools and literacy features of classrooms, Teacher interviews with teachers and 44-item questionnaire; tests of reading skills at Gr 1 and 4 level in April and Nov.	Reading is both an individual cognitive-linguistic achievement and a socially constructed form of human behaviour. Literacy instruction at school enculturates children into the functions and value of literacy in society.	Family literacy Project, KZN. 20 teachers.	What kind of literacy environment do the schools provide? Do learners achieve the reading assessment standards? What are the teacher's literacy practices and perceptions?	Re teachers' literacy practices: 60% have fewer than 10 books at home. Majority see themselves as average rather than skilled readers, only 1 was able to name a book she had read outside of school; 11% don't like reading and read only to study; none were members of a library; 26% read stories to their own children. In the school: 57% believe training in reading theories and methods was thorough; 34% aware that S were not performing to standard; 56% felt that S were average readers who understand most of what they read; 50% felt adequate time is given to reading in schools; 20% use charts of consonant vowel combinations and flashcards; 30% make S read words and sentences in chorus; Activities involve attention to print (lists of letters/words) rather than extended discourse.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Hugo, A.J. Le Roux, S.G. Muller, H. Nel, N.M. (UNISA, education)	2005	<i>Journal for Language Teaching</i> Phonological awareness and the minimising of reading problems: a South African perspective	Administration of phonological awareness test at end of Gr 0 and then a year later at end of Gr 1 (word reading test). US test redesigned in Afrikaans and adapted for cultural differences – tests identification of rhyme, words, counting syllables, words starting with same sound, counting phonemes, word comparison Detailed statistical analysis.	Emergent literacy ; Starting point is the NCS, which advocates a balanced literacy programme including real book reading and phonics, and daily phonological awareness activities together with letter presentation; Reading consists of 2 equally important processes – top down and bottom up. Reading readiness programme advocated.	N=24 Afrikaans L1 Grade 0 learners in Rustenburg area. Random selection of learners from high, average and below average achievers.	Can phonological awareness assist in identifying preschoolers at risk of manifesting reading problems once they enter school?	Phonological awareness (as a combined measure) has positive effect on reading success. Greatest influence on development of phonological awareness in school using a “tutoring approach” – not explored further, poor results in a school using a whole word approach (though these children had less problem understanding what they read (p.233). Frequency of decoding practice leads to ease of application.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Ntuli, D Pretorius, E.J. (UNISA, African languages, Linguistics)	2005	<i>Southern African Linguistics And Applied Language Studies</i> Laying foundations for academic language competence: the effects of storybook reading on Zulu language, literacy and discourse development.	Pre and post intervention test in Zulu to test story recall, free storytelling, book behaviour, language development (length of utterance, counts of nouns and verbs, use of past and present tense)	Emergent literacy Cummins (2002): BICS and CALP	Family literacy Project, KZN. N=26 (aged 2-7) in 3 crèches, assessed in April and then Nov 2001	What are the effects of storybook reading in Zulu on the language and emergent literacy of pre-school children?	Gr R children showed improvements in all language and literacy measures after 8 months of consistent exposure to story book activities in school, and outperformed Gr 1 peers in same measures.
Mothibeli, A	2005	<i>Edusource Data News</i> Cross-country achievement results from the SACMEQ II project – 2000 to 2002; A quantitative analysis of education systems in Southern and Eastern Africa.	Comparative study of mean scores, expert judgements and competence levels	Reading for meaning , interpretation, inference, analysis and critical reading is emphasised as goal .	Gr 6	What were the results of the 2000-2002 SACMEQ II project?	South African children fared below average out of 14 countries. 8 levels of reading skill identified. Even at emergent reading level, use of various cuing systems is signalled.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Willenberg, I (UWC, Child and youth research)	2005	<i>Language Matters</i> Starting at the beginning: early childhood literacy intervention as a strategy for reducing adult illiteracy.	Expository Emergent literacy perspective	Not explicit	none	none	Proposes improved early literacy instruction and intervention in families and communities to promote literacy development. Widespread misconception that literacy development begins in Gr 1 has deleterious implications for Gr1 experiences. Related misconception is that literacy can only be developed through structured formal activities; pervasive lack of understanding or association between language and literacy, lack of activities to promote use of decontextualised language.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Wildsmith-Cromarty, R. Gounden, J UKZN, Applied Language Studies	2006	<i>Per Linguam</i> A balanced reading programme for Grade one and two learners of English as a first and as additional Language.	Ethnographic and interpretive Observation, interviews	Interactive model of reading: Balanced literacy, Literacy as social practice, draws on Vygotsky	2 year study of N=6 Grade 1 & 2 children learning LAL at working class multicultural urban school, plus their parents.	Can a balanced approach to literacy instruction, which emphasises both skills and meaningful comprehension, be used to facilitate reading and improve comprehension and enjoyment in a large class of Foundation Phase learners who come mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds, including African children who are learning through the medium of English? Which teaching techniques and approaches to reading stimulate learner motivation and positive learning attitudes?	Children learning in EAL are at a disadvantage, but this can be counter-balanced by use of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced approach to teaching reading • Extensive reading • Native language to respond to and understand literature encouraged • Collaborative learning promotes communicative competence • Parental support programme

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Pretorius, EJ Mampuru, DM (UNISA; linguistics & African language)	2007	<i>Journal of Research in Reading</i> Playing football without a ball: language, reading and academic performance in a high poverty high school.	Quasi-experimental Observations, teacher questionnaires; pre and post tests. Intervention: provision of library resources, teacher workshops, family literacy workshops; after 1 year, language and reading tests in L1 and L2, including inference, close, anaphoric resolution, reading rate test.	L1 / L2 learning Cummins,2000 – linguistic interdependence hypothesis; Bernhardt and Kamil (1995) Linguistic threshold hypothesis	2002-04 n=94 Gr 7, Gauteng township Based on “ Reading is FUNDamental ” project Tests in L1 and L2	Is reading in home language a language or a reading issue? What are the differences in language and reading scores in N.Sotho (L1) and English (L2)? Does attention to reading and greater access to books improve reading test scores among G7 learners in N.Sotho & English? What is the relationship between. Language and reading ability in N.Sotho and English?	<i>w.r.t. Foundation Phase:</i> in spite of having had N.Sotho as LoLT for 3 years in FP, Gr 7 learners had problems with reading comprehension in both L1 and L2 – points to importance of the teaching factor and Mathew effects on reading. Probably inadequate phonics instruction in FP. Failures at Grade 7 relate to severe reading difficulties that were never attended to in lower grades. L1 proficiency does not significantly predict L1 reading performance. L2 reading ability was a stronger predictor of L1 reading ability. Possible that weak L1 reading knowledge short-circuits the use of L1 skills over time. L2 proficiency is strong determinant for L2 reading;

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Sailors, M Hoffman, J.V. Mathee, B (USA and READ)	2007	<i>Reading Research Quarterly</i> South African schools that promote literacy learning with students from low-income communities.	Qualitative, interpretive, case-study analytical model – inspection of high achieving schools after 5 years of an intervention which provided resources and training; interviews with teachers & management	Not specified	READ/ Business Trust Learning for Living project	What factors promote literacy learning in “against the odds” schools in South Africa?	Strong and central focus on language and literacy achievement in these schools, Safe, orderly, positive learning environment. Strong organisation & finance leadership, community relations, academic leaders; shared decision making. Excellent teachers (commitment, caring, collaboration). Rich print environment; prominent display of materials; home language on walls in FP; commercial and teacher prepared texts; engagement of S with language and print; rich discussion around text; scaffolding of literacy learning; integration of literacy into content areas – Shared sense pride and purpose in the school (reputation, language policy , maintenance of culture, clean facilities, confident students, collectiveness, purpose shaped by history; school-community link)

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Dixon, D, Place, J. Kholowa, F (Wits, Education)	2008	<i>South African Review of Education</i> In(sites): examining early literacy practices at home and school in rural Malawi and South Africa.	Comparative analysis of data collected from interviews, observation and photographs	NLS Discourse theory (Critical Literacy framework focusing on place)	5 farm schools in Lydenburg District (Mpumalanga) and 4 preschools in Malawi.	What are the physical conditions under which children in rural schools acquire literacy? What are the common pedagogical practices at these sites?	Reliance on rote learning of alphabetic principle, teaching of decontextualised sounds, Limited understanding of importance of books for acquiring literacy; children not seen as emerging readers; Drawing and writing seen as isolated activities, not used to express themselves, mainly copying lists of letters; inadequate teacher knowledge and preparation .
Condy, J (CPUT)	2008	<i>South African Journal of Education</i> The development of an enabling self-administered questionnaire for enhancing reading teachers' professional pedagogic insights.	Gilder, Irwin-Carruthers and Kent 1985 method ; Cautious varimax normalised factor analyses used; 9 phases of development of questionnaire	Social constructivist, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic (Piaget, Vygotsky, Cambourne and Goodman) “Language is learned using text, through coherent sentences in which meaning is salient and negotiated in many ways”	1999-2003. Gathered data from 1000 qualified active reading teachers using Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) programme in Western Cape	Development, validation and implementation of questionnaire (Core Indicators of an Effective Reading Teacher CIETQ) to define T's perceived professional competencies in teaching reading skills and strategies in Gr 1-7 in developing countries	It is possible to identify, clarify and verify a profile of core indicators of an effective reading teacher that is comprehensive and consistent with the current policy documents and in terms of current theoretical studies on the teaching of reading. Use of large repeat samples has led to better defined and well-integrated description of the component sectors in the emerging profile.

Author, Institution and discipline	Date	Journal and Title	Method	View of literacy/literacy theory	Research site and sample	Research Question	Findings
Muthivhi, A.	2008	<i>Southern African Review of Education</i> Language policy, classroom practice and concept learning in a Grade 1 Tshivenda classroom.	Qualitative Lesson observation; researcher notes.	Vygotsky (language is inextricably related to development and growth of knowledge)	1996-2000. 2 primary schools in Venda	Do practices of classroom teaching & learning emphasise discourse of everyday or systematised school specific language?	Problems of teaching and learning have their origin in both the teaching methods employed and the use of language as an instructional medium; emphasis on ability to verbalise words over writing/ inadequate teacher subject matter knowledge- unable to offer pedagogically sound explanations; low expectations of learners; use of MT was not unproblematic; abstract, formal knowledge of language reduced to spontaneous everyday knowledge.
Hoadley, U (HSRC/UCT)	2008	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i> Social class and pedagogy: a model for the investigation of pedagogic variation	Bernsteinian pedagogical analysis of video & classroom observation	Bernstein – social class reproduction via school Dowling – domains and strategies Pedro- instructional form	4 Grade 3 teachers in each of middle class and working class schools in Cape Town	To specify the structuring of the pedagogy and pedagogic relation to an extended Bernsteinian frame	Working class schools operate according to a horizontal modality, while middle class schools are more vertical. Clear differences within class discernable. Orientation to meaning is the crucial variable associated with social class in the reproduction of inequality through pedagogy

It can be seen from Table 3 that relatively little research has been published in peer-reviewed journals regarding the development of reading and writing skills in South African children in the early grades. It is striking that the vast majority of the research which has been done focuses on the broad theme “disadvantage” as a barrier to the development of reading competence. Very few studies highlight examples of effective practice, focus on linguistic issues, whole-school factors or teacher knowledge and beliefs. There appears to be some sort of hierarchy regarding the locus of literacy studies, with a preponderance of studies examining academic literacy at tertiary level, fewer studies regarding literacy development at high schools and in higher primary schools and extremely few which explore the crucial stage of learning to read in the early years of school. In contrast, literally thousands of studies about learning to read emanate from the developed world, making claims and counterclaims citing research evidence, test scores, theoretical perspectives and so on that support or refute different perspectives. While South Africans should and do try to use this research to understand South African learners, it is a great weakness of our knowledge production industry that so little research work focuses on one of our most pressing and fundamental educational problems.

It is also striking that published research regarding early reading development in South Africa emanates substantially from academics at UNISA and the University of Pretoria, and that many of the primary researchers are not education specialists per se but rather applied linguists, librarians, audiologists or anatomists. This is on one hand a testimony to the multi-disciplinary nature of the reading process, but it should also be a challenge to those concerned directly with teaching and training teachers to focus their research on this crucial area of academic development.

In contrast with the international literature, the study of early literacy in South Africa is not characterised by a variety of epistemological or methodological approaches. From the research reported in Table 3, it is not possible to discern bodies of research exploring particular traditions or particular theories about reading or child development. The field of research is fragmented. While there is a dearth of South African research regarding the development of reading, even less research appears to have been published on the development of writing in South African school children, with the exception of research about writing for academic purposes. Perhaps this is a consequence of the pervasive view of teachers that writing should only be taught after a child has learned to read, and the

misconception created by C2005 (see Section 3.4.1 below) that teaching writing is not important. The only research which I found on emergent writing was reported by Bloch (2002). This report contains some marvellous examples of children's writing, and a discussion of the value of interactive writing. Bloch supports Krashen's view that spelling is most effectively improved through reading (Bloch, 2002, p. 75) and emphasises that this is another pointer to the need for print-rich environments.

None of the studies reported in Table 3 focus specifically on the teaching of reading for meaning, the key focus of my own study, although a few identify the lack of focus on meaning as a problem (Macdonald, 2002; Mothibeli, 2005).

In the next section I discuss five themes which emerge from the literature on teaching reading in South Africa presented in this overview, starting with broader contextual issues and focusing in through school and classroom factors.

3.4 THEMES IN SOUTH AFRICAN READING RESEARCH

3.4.1 The National Curriculum Statement

The National Curriculum Statement provides the policy framework within which teaching of reading in this case study occurred. One group of explanations for the poor reading performance of South African school children focuses on the curriculum. Before considering critiques of the curriculum, the expectations it sets out for the teaching of Foundation Phase learners are discussed.

At the time this research was conducted, the curriculum in operation in South Africa was called the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* or RNCS (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2002). This curriculum was formalised, unchanged, into the *National Curriculum Statement* or NCS in 2006. The Revised National Curriculum Statement was the result of the revision of the first curriculum to apply to the whole of South Africa, called *Curriculum 2005* (C2005), which was constructed on outcomes-based principles (see Chisholm et al., 2000, for a critique of C2005). It should be noted that while supporting

policy documents such as those connected with the *Foundations for Learning Campaign*, gazetted in 2008, the *Reading Policy Handbook* (South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, n.d.), and the *National Reading Strategy* (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2008b) clarified and provided detail regarding the teaching of literacy in the Foundation Phase of schooling, the NCS has remained the key guiding document. It is evident that any teacher in the Foundation Phase has to understand and integrate the contents of a number of (sometimes contradictory as will shortly be explained) documents in the process of determining what to do in the classroom.

The NCS explicitly aims to produce life-long learners who are “confident and independent, literate, numerate and multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen” (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2002, p. 4).

According to the NCS, in the Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3), reading is taught as part of the Literacy Learning Programme, which is allocated 40% of the curricular time, or 1 hour and 50 minutes a day for Grades R, 1 and 2, and two hours a day for Grade 3. The Literacy Learning Programme has six Learning Outcomes, namely: (1) listening; (2) speaking; (3) reading and viewing; (4) writing; (5) thinking and reasoning; and (6) language structure and use. It is acknowledged that these Learning Outcomes are integrally linked. Outcome 3, relating to reading and viewing is most specific about how the learner is seen to learn to read. This outcome intends to produce a learner who is “able to read and view for information and enjoyment and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts” (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2002, p. 33).

The curricular time allocated for the Literacy Learning Programme includes work in both first and second languages. *The teacher’s guide to the curriculum in the Foundation Phase* (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003b) sets out various scenarios for the balance of time to be spent teaching L1 and L2. The NCS advocates that children should study through the medium of their home language “where possible.”

According to the NCS, over the course of the Foundation Phase, the Assessment Standards for English Home Language for “Reading and Viewing” require that the learner:

- Uses visual cues to make meaning (Grades R – 3);
- Role-plays reading (Grades R – 1);
- Makes meaning of written text (Grades R – 3);
- Starts recognising and making meaning of letters and words (Grade R);
- Recognises letters and words and makes meaning of written text (Grade 1);
- Recognises and makes meaning of words in longer texts (Grade 2);
- Reads texts alone and uses a variety of strategies to make meaning (Grade 3);
- Begins developing phonic awareness (Grade R);
- Develops phonics awareness (Grades 1 & 2);
- Consolidates phonic awareness (Grade 3);
- Reads for information and enjoyment (Grades 1 – 3).

At Grade 1 level the English First Additional Language curriculum regarding the “Reading and Viewing” learning outcome involves the learners using pictures to understand written text, matching words and objects by sticking labels on objects, following printed instructions on one-word flash cards, reading picture books with one- or two-word captions and building up sight recognition of common words, as well as developing phonemic awareness by recognising initial consonants and short vowel sounds.

It is unclear from the NCS whether or not all the criteria for the “Reading and Viewing” outcome must be met, and the curriculum does not highlight “warning signs” for reading problems which might guide teachers to take appropriate action (Pretorius & Naudé, 2004, p. 49).

The NCS supports an emergent literacy approach rather than reading readiness, and it advocates teaching both decoding and meaning-making, though “reading for meaning is the main purpose” (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2002, p. 23). It specifies a “balanced approach” (2002, p. 22) saying that learners should both read “real books” and learn phonics (2002, p. 23). Teachers are exhorted to create print-rich classrooms (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003b, p. 23).

The *Teacher's Guide to the Curriculum in the Foundation Phase* (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003b) presents a slightly different interpretation of the teaching of literacy in the Foundation Phase to the NCS. The Teacher's Guide advocates "an eclectic approach" to teaching literacy (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003b, p. 50) as opposed to the "balanced approach" referred to in the NCS. As detailed in Chapter 2, balance in literacy teaching has been variously interpreted, but it is seen in a more coherent theoretical way than is implied by simply adopting an eclectic collection of methodologies. The Teacher's Guide states that language is gradually and (mostly) subconsciously acquired, through the experience of large amounts of input in which 80% is familiar, and developed by productive language output in which semantic mistakes are part of the acquisition process (2003, p. 49-50). The assertion in the Teacher's Guide that "We learn a First Additional Language and develop that language in much the same way as we learn our home language" (2003, p. 50) is described by Reeves et al. as "theoretically incorrect" (2008, p. 50).

The Teacher's Guide promotes "the communicative approach" to language teaching. Reeves et al. argue that this approach fails to develop a solid enough foundation of literacy in the mother tongue to enable the later development of literacy in English as a second language for academic purposes (2008, p. 46). Practically, teachers have also not been given sufficient support about what communicative language teaching entails, and many teachers have mistakenly believed that the communicative approach favours speaking and listening above reading and writing (Abadzi, 2006, p. 76).

There are various published critiques of the curriculum as a whole. For example, Jansen (1999) critiques the outcomes-based nature of the curriculum, Chisholm (2006) provides an understanding of the politics of the curriculum developments and Allais (2007) focuses on its technicist nature. Macdonald (2002), E. Pretorius and Naudé (2002), Bloch (2005) and Reeves et al. (2008) specifically comment on the reading (or, more broadly, literacy) curriculum.

Macdonald notes that the precursor to the NCS, Curriculum 2005, was developed without the input of any primary school teachers on the language committees with the consequence that "The nature and demands of learning to read and write were totally ignored and consequently the capacity of children to create meaning for themselves during the whole course of their school learning was fundamentally compromised" (Macdonald, 2002, p. 136). She criticises

the NCS for "technicism run riot" which "detracts from ...developing and nurturing the creation of meaning at the very earliest of levels" (Macdonald, 2002, p. 117).

Bloch maintains that the NCS does not take into account the realities of the linguistic contexts in which students live, and that this is a major barrier to their learning to read and write.

The fact that so many children grow up in communities where they rarely if ever come into contact with reading and writing being used powerfully and meaningfully in their home languages has not influenced the design or implementation of curricula.... We are still gripped by the erroneous belief that we can teach reading and writing in social and cultural vacuums, as sets of skills which will constitute the 'tools' for reading and writing. (Bloch, 2005, p.7)

Reeves et al. characterise the NCS as “loose[ly] ideological” (2008, p. xx) and argue that “The whole language approach and more laissez-faire approaches to literacy development, in conjunction with the communicative approach to language teaching are having seriously negative effects on the education of the majority of children who are from socially disadvantaged communities.” (2008, p. xxi). This echoes the arguments of Delpit and Abadzi recounted in Chapter 2.

From these few critical assessments of the South African reading curriculum the conclusion must be drawn that the curriculum itself may be a barrier to children learning to read. It is contended that a well trained and competent teacher may well be able to work easily with this curriculum, but that for the average teacher in the average South African school it provides too little guidance, too little structure and too little focus.

3.4.2 Socio-economic and cultural factors

Nearly all the literature on teaching reading in South Africa focuses in some way on the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on reading achievement. This is in line with an accumulation of studies in other parts of the world, which focuses, for example, on what are perceived as inadequate childrearing practices, lack of stimulating early language and literacy environments, lack of reading material, learning in a second (or third) language, the pernicious effects of individual and national poverty, and cultural differences leading to lack of motivation to succeed in school.

Low socio-economic status affects health and therefore cognition in a general sense. Low birth weights, difficult births, exposure to environmental toxins, repeated infections, including parasitic infections, and chronic food insecurity can cause developmental delays (Abadzi, 2006; Fleisch, 2008; Verspoor & Lockheed, 1992). There is a complex relationship between school achievement in general and poverty, unemployment, home factors and health. Fleisch asserts that in South Africa we have not been able to satisfactorily measure the effects of background characteristics (Fleisch, 2008, p. 53). Abadzi argues, however, that poverty and malnutrition do not prevent children from learning to read, though they may have reduced working memory capacity and attention spans, and may need more hours of instruction and practice (Abadzi, 2006, p. 42).

Some of this literature relies on cultural-deficit explanations. For example, E.Pretorius and Naudé (2002) explained their findings of low levels of emergent literacy, poor oral sentence construction, poor sense of syntax, inadequate sound development and knowledge of the alphabet, and poor phonemic awareness skills in school beginners in a South African informal settlement in terms of inadequate family literacy experiences, parental non-involvement and deficient sensorimotor development as a result of the cultural practice of *pépa*, where the infant/child is carried on the mother's back for prolonged periods of time (E. Pretorius & Naudé, 2002, p. 410). In another study, Naudé, cited in E. Pretorius and Naudé (2002) concluded that "disadvantaged black cultures" in South Africa have produced cognitive styles which favour right hemisphere thinking (wholistic, intuitive) rather than left hemisphere (analytical, rational, objective) functions, thus limiting their ability to describe, explain and interpret the meaning of concepts which is essential in schooling.

3.4.3 Language of instruction

A substantial proportion of the South African literature on reading focuses on the language of instruction/ language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and particularly around whether early education for speakers of African languages should be in the mother tongue, in English or bilingual education. This is an ongoing debate and will only be treated briefly here in order to situate the current study. This literature does not challenge the fact that at some point African

language speakers should learn to speak English and that at some point they will end up learning through the medium of English. Rather, the debates are around at which point the changeover should take place and how this should be managed.

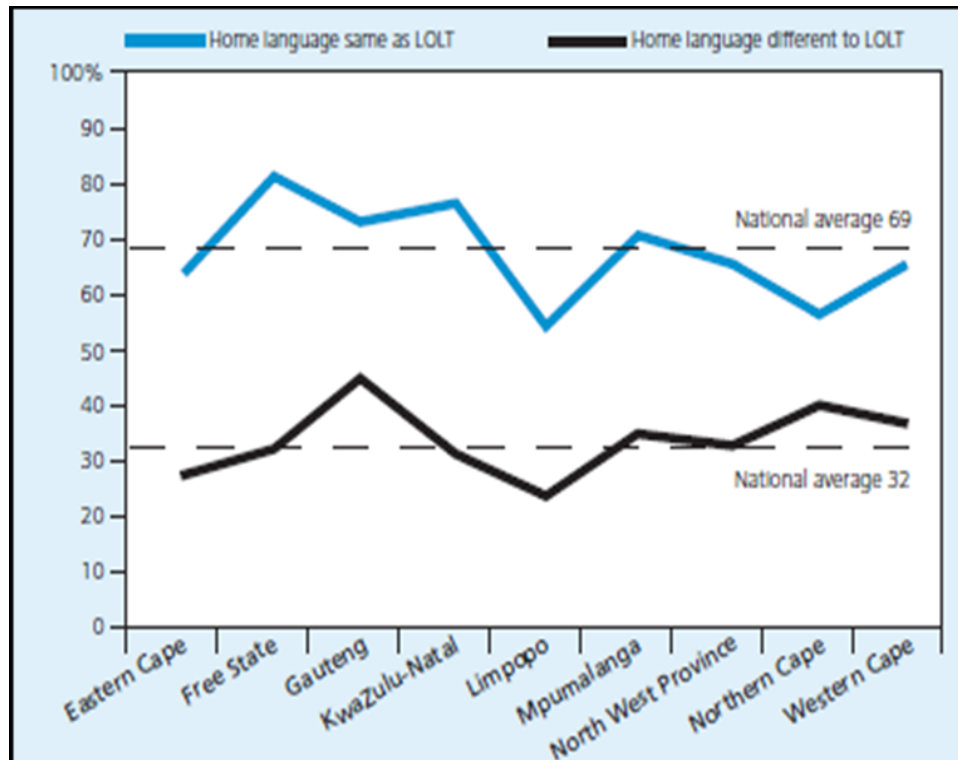
There is a mismatch between the NCS, the Language in Education Policy (LIEP) (South Africa. National Department of Education, 1997) and the South African Schools Act (South Africa, 1996) in this regard. The LIEP proposes literacy in the mother tongue for 6-8 years, while an additional language (in practice, English) is learned through an additive bilingualism model from Grade 3 onwards. The NCS advocates instruction “where possible” in the mother tongue for 3 years and an additive bilingual model for the introduction of a second language. Reeves et al. argue that in practice it is a subtractive-transitional bilingual model (2008, p. 49), followed by a switch to instruction in English. This means one year less mother tongue instruction than under apartheid-era policy. In addition, the Schools Act gives School Governing Bodies the power to decide the language policy of a school. In many cases this results in parents making decisions based on neither policy nor educational grounds but on the basis of language status, as in the case of the present study (Broom, 2004; De Klerk, 2002; Taylor & Vinjevoold, 1999).

Data, for example, that reported on the Grade 6 systemic evaluation (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2005), shows that learners who are schooled in a language other than their home language perform considerably less well than those who learn in their mother tongue. This is illustrated in Figure 8 below. However, while interpreting Figure 8, it should be remembered that issues of language of instruction intersect in South Africa with factors such as class, race, rural/urban issues, historical expenditure on school facilities, including books and differences in teacher training.

In 1990 Macdonald published the influential Threshold Project report which strongly criticised the education system for failing to support learners in the transition from learning in their mother tongue to learning in English. Macdonald argued that this placed “immense language learning and cognitive demands” on the student (2002, p. 127).

Figure 8: Grade 6 language achievement by province where the language of instruction is the same as and different from the home language

(Source: Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation National Report: South Africa. Department of Education 2005)



Heugh's position is that optimal gains in reading are achieved in Africa when an African language is maintained as the medium of instruction for at least 6 years. "Programmes that phase out African language by the 4th grade are too short for learners to gain mastery of the African language as a language or as a building block for other languages" (Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), 2006, p. 79). Similarly, Abadzi argues that "the number of years of instruction in the first language is the most important predictor of reading performance in a second language" (2006, p. 53).

Opposing teaching and learning in a language other than the home language, Schreuder (2008) uses strong language. She argues that it constitutes "cognitive hijacking" because three foundational education principles are "violated" in such situations:

1. The principle that cognitive development and development of a child's mother tongue go hand in hand.

2. The principle that mother tongue education in the formative years does not retard acquisition of a second (or third) language but facilitates it.
3. And the principle that children bring with them a broad array of skills when they go to school which should be leveraged and developed in the classroom.

It is important to note, along with Pretorius and Machet (2004), that poor literacy results cannot be attributed only to the fact that many South Africans are learning in a second or third language: "Teachers and learners are struggling with literacy in the African languages as well as English" (p. 48).

3.4.4 Whole school factors

Although a number of South African studies have considered what makes schools effective in general (Christie et al., 2007; Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Prinsloo, 2005) and the achievements of learners in literacy and numeracy are obviously part of this issue, only one study focuses specifically on the general conditions in schools which promote literacy learning. Sailors, Hoffman and Matthee (2007) examined seven historically disadvantaged schools in South Africa which consistently "beat the odds" (2007, p. 368) in terms of literacy achievements of learners. Using inductive analysis from observations and interviews, they identified five characteristics of these high performing schools:

- The schools offer a safe, orderly and positive learning environment;
- The schools are guided by strong leaders (within the school, within the community, as academics and as shared decision makers);
- The teachers are excellent (including having good qualifications and many years of experience, being committed, caring and collaborative);
- There is a shared sense of competence, pride and purpose in these schools (the schools all had good reputations with the community and the Department of Education, they had commitment to the school's language policy, to the maintenance of culture, to clean and orderly facilities; learners were confident and competent, there were partnerships between community stakeholders and the schools);
- Schools are involved in the local community and the community is involved in the school (including very active involvement of parents).

Sailors et al. observed that these schools which beat the odds offered print-rich environments. “In the Foundation Phase classrooms we found the home language of the learners on the walls, on the desks and in the hands of the children” (Sailors et al., 2007, p. 379). Learners were engaged with language and print in various ways, including having rich discussions about texts. Teachers were observed scaffolding literacy learning. The researchers noted that the schools focused on reading and not on writing, and that writing instruction remained a problem even in these schools.

3.4.5 Classroom practice

A relatively consistent picture of classroom practice in Foundation Phase reading classrooms in South Africa emerges from the few studies which have attempted to describe it.

Bloch (1996) presents the most detailed description of early literacy classes in South Africa which I encountered while conducting this study. She describes typical classroom interactions where the emphasis is on the teacher giving instructions and eliciting the right answers, often in the form of chanting. She observes a focus on phonics, on reading decontextualised words, a lack of story reading, a lack of playful engagement with language through rhyme, and a lack of literacy activities with meaning to the child's life. She argues that many teachers do not value what children bring to the classroom from their homes and communities, and do not see children as capable of taking initiative in the reading and writing process. Mistakes are seen as the result of not listening properly, rather than part of learning and discovery. There is an emphasis on mechanical skills such as letter formation and neatness (1996, p. 17-19). Teachers, she argues, think of it as 'normal' to teach language as decontextualised bits and as a result tend to explain the difficulties children experience as phonics weaknesses rather than asking about whether what is expected of the children makes any sense to them (1996, p. 22-23). She is concerned that issues about approaches to literacy teaching have been "sidelined" by focusing on which language children should learn in (1996, p. 31). I shall return to Bloch's study in the final chapter of this thesis.

Taylor and Vinjevold's influential report, *Getting Learning Right* (1999) records a number of similar classroom practices: lessons are dominated by teacher talk and low level questions; there is an absence of higher order skill activities such as investigation, understanding

relationships and curiosity; real world examples are often superficially used; there is little group work; little reading and writing is done, and it is rudimentary. Writing is largely confined to one-word answers at the end of the lesson; there is a lot of copying without comprehension; writing whole sentences is rare. This report details the findings of various other studies. One interesting finding by Schollar is that schools spent an average of 4% of their time reading (in Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999, p. 151). Duncan found that discrete reading lessons in initial reading programmes hardly existed in the 1990s. The teaching of reading seems to be "incidental and sporadic rather than a principal focus and outcome of lessons" (in Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999, p. 152).

Broom's investigation of English reading proficiency of Grade 3 learners attending 20 public schools in Gauteng in 1999 showed that "the performance of L2 English learners was considerably below that of their L1 peers, especially in some schools, which suggests that an early transition to English LOLT may be perpetuating the inequalities of the past" (Broom, 2004, p. 506). A test was specifically designed in collaboration with teachers, with oral and written components. Learners were prepared for the test, familiarising them with pictures and teaching vocabulary they would need to follow instructions. Ex-Department of Education and Training schools ("black") and ex-House of Representatives schools ("coloured") performed worse than the ex-House of Assembly schools ("white") and ex-House of Delegates schools ("indian") schools. As all the words and pictures had been pre-taught, it was not just their knowledge of English which caused low performance on reading sub-tests. Broom argued that "It is possible that teacher-centered instructional methods in the classroom may have influenced their performance" (2004, p. 518).

Ramarumo (1996) reports on a study of Grade 1 classrooms in 5 rural schools the Thohoyandou district. She describes a typical reading lesson videoed in this project, which resonates with the findings of this research:

At no time in the reading lesson were pupils given an opportunity to read or handle books; there was no opportunity to read continuous text. The teacher did not model reading from a book. Pupils had no opportunity to hold a book, nor turn the pages, or follow lines of print in a meaningful context. The glaring inadequacy was that the reading skills drilled during this lesson were not contextualised in terms of a holistic approach to literacy development. (Ramarumo, 1996, p. 347)

Prinsloo's study of preschools in the Cape Town area showed how explicit pedagogy was "exclusively dedicated to recitation" in these schools (Prinsloo, 2005, p. 144). He notes how

children are involved in various “naming practices” (2005, p. 147), such as reciting the alphabet (“A is for...”) without attempt to explain meanings of words or to show the letters of the alphabet in other contexts.

Attaching names to specific things, located in lists probably has some use, but when it is identified as what school learning is about, such practices can be seen as problematic learning activities. Extended to later literacy learning, to such activities such as practicing the recitation of phonic drills, they become even more problematic, in that they do not represent or initiate the social and cognitive strategies that go into the practices of reading and writing except in the very restricted version of reading and writing as naming activities. (Prinsloo, 2005, p. 147)

Prinsloo observes how recitations, chanting, drilling of phonics and other list-learning “are as much about regulating a group of small children as they are about literacy teaching” (2005, p. 156). This, he concludes, is what children learn about what reading and writing mean in the context of school-based practices.

Willenberg (2005) outlines two important pedagogical issues which limit literacy development in South Africa. Firstly, there is a common misconception that literacy only begins in Grade 1, and that it can only be developed through structured, formal learning. Willenberg argues that this has a negative impact on Grade R, where teachers often try to avoid planning formal and informal literacy activities. Secondly she argues that teachers do not sufficiently understand how language and literacy are interrelated, and that children need to engage in enriching conversations to develop the kind of decontextualised language skills needed in academic life. Such activities would include recounting past events, planning future events, providing explanations and being involved in various kinds of play activities.

When we consider classroom practice as a factor in the development of reading proficiency, the extent to which learners read extensively is also an important consideration. Pretorius and Ribbens (2005, p. 144) showed that “unless learners are exposed to extensive reading, they do not easily develop those meaning construction processes so central to comprehension”. They also showed that many young readers cannot access different genres of writing, including literature genres (which affect motivation to read).

Condy (2008) conducted a four year project in South Africa to “establish a set of competencies describing teachers’ professional understandings of their pedagogical reading tasks” (2008, p. 609). From this research emerged 41 themes regarding what the teachers

think the best teachers of primary reading do on a daily basis. These themes are listed in Figure 7 below. The difference in focus between Condý's work and the work on effective teachers in Britain reported in Section 2.5.3 is remarkable. Condý does not explicitly analyse theoretical and methodological approaches to the teaching of reading, and as can be seen from Figure 7, does not mention creating opportunities to practice reading, modelling effective reading, strategies for meaning interpretation, only mentions the use of phonic cues to read difficult words and calls for questioning to determine if students have understood the text in the same way. Condý's list mentions "the deeper meaning of a story" but gives no guidance as to what effective teachers do to help learners to access this meaning. She emphasises the use of texts to help solve social problems, to sensitise learners to cultural issues and to stimulate discussion on controversial issues. Condý's indicators of effective primary school reading teachers reflects the dominant view in South Africa that children should be "taught" to read in the Foundation Phase, but that from then on in schooling such instruction is not necessary.

Figure 9: Core Indicators of an Effective Reading Teacher (CIERTO)
(Condý, 2008)

Reading for scaffolding techniques:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

1. Encourage their learners to find fictional and non-fictional materials in response to a theme.
2. Display these books in the class to encourage the learners to read them.
3. Allow time for their learners to retell the story in their own words.
4. Read, understand and write using a variety of text types with their learners.
5. Refer to and use stories to solve social problems in the class such as stealing.
6. Choose appropriate text resources to solve problems and make decisions.
7. Link the text to the learner's prior knowledge.
8. Allow their learners time to respond to what has been read.
9. Allow their learners to summarise written text.

Reading for meaning and interpretation:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

10. Explore different interpretations of idiomatic and figurative expressions found in text.
11. Explore the moral of a story.
12. Explore the deeper meaning of a story.
13. Compare and contrast elements in a story such as character, setting or events.
14. Make time to talk about author's styles of writing.
15. Speak to the learners in an ordered, clear and well-organised manner.

Reading for scanning and research:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

16. When choosing a book, guide their learners to read reviews rather than looking at covers.
17. Discuss interpersonal relationships amongst the characters in a story.

18. When reading, encourage their learners to self-correct so that the meaning is maintained.
19. Encourage their learners to find resources inside their school to complete projects.
20. Identify popular reading resources in the community.
21. Allow time for their learners to skim and scan the text to find relevant information.

Reading for reflection and analysis:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

22. When reading books encourage objective discussions on controversial social issues.
23. Encourage their learners to make judgments about information in the text.
24. Use graphic aids such as graphs and tables to interpret information in a text.
25. Provide opportunities to discover major ideas in text and supporting ideas.
26. Sensitise learners to cultural issues.
27. Spend time analysing plots and characters of stories.

Reading for understanding:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

28. Teach learners to apply their knowledge of phonics when reading difficult words.
29. Re-read the text if the meaning is not clear.
30. Teach editing skills such as spelling, grammar and punctuation.
31. Encourage their learners to read with appropriate expression.
32. Build a rapport with their learners.
33. Allow opportunities to teach the meanings of difficult vocabulary.
34. Ask probing questions about the content to see if their learners understand the text.
35. Check to see that different readers understand the content of a story in the same way.

Reading for application:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

36. Compare text information with their learners.
37. Use discussions from the text as a form of review.
38. Make predictions from the passage.
39. Role model social skills such as taking turns and listening to others.

Reading to make judgments:

The best teachers of reading are those who:

40. Use correct grammatical structures when speaking to their learners.
41. Allow learners time to give opinions of the text.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on reading and learning to read in the South African context. First I considered evidence that there is a “reading problem” in the country. Second, I provided an overview of recent research published in peer-reviewed journals regarding reading and the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase in South Africa. This review showed that there is little research and little coherence between studies in this crucial field. Thereafter, the curriculum documents which guided the teaching of reading at the time of this study were examined, as well as literature regarding factors which have an impact on reading

achievement such as socio-economic conditions, the language of instruction, whole school practices and classroom practices. Together with Chapter 2 this provides insight into the complex theoretical and practical field in which reading teachers in South Africa, and in particular, the teachers in this case study, operate.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the issues of research design, data collection and data analysis relevant to this study. Section 4.2 reiterates the purpose of the study which has been key to choices made during the pragmatic design of this research. Section 4.3 considers issues of my own positionality. Section 4.4 briefly describes the broad orientation of the study, addressing the nature of the research as a case study, clarifying how the quantitative and qualitative components of the research fit together and considering issues relating to trustworthiness and ethics. Section 4.5 focuses specifically on the sources and methods of collection of research material.

Although Terre Blanche and Durheim (1999, p. 462) point out that the use of the term “data” is not universally popular in relation to interpretivist research such as this because it suggests bits of discrete information which are separately gathered and analysed, I will use the term “data” interchangeably with the more neutral term “research material” in this dissertation for ease of reference.

The focus of this study was on teachers and their actions, and teachers were thus the primary source of data. The primary data collection method was a transect walk through classrooms (this is explained in detail in Section 4.4.2), with data recording in the form of photographs and field notes. Data was also collected through interviews, a questionnaire, and observation of lessons. Supplementary data was collected from other stakeholders in the classroom context through interviewing the school principal and the Head of Department (Foundation Phase) and through analysing drawings by children of their literacy lessons. Section 4.5 details the processes and tools used in data analysis.

4.2 THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

I have taken a pragmatic approach to this research. The decisions I have made regarding the design of the study have been guided by the purpose of the research and the questions the study is trying to answer. A pragmatic approach, according to Morgan (2007), has three key characteristics. Firstly it relies on abductive reasoning that “moves back and forth between induction and deduction – first converting observations into theories and then assessing those theories through action” (2007, p. 71). Secondly, it recognises that practicing researchers work back and forth between subjectivity and objectivity in an intersubjective way (2007, pp. 71-72). Thirdly, instead of sole emphasis on context as in qualitative research or sole emphasis on generality as in quantitative research, a pragmatic approach to research emphasises transferability across settings. Morgan argues that such an approach is strong and properly integrated because it emphasises “the connection between epistemological concerns about the nature of the knowledge that we produce and technical concerns about the methods that we use to generate that knowledge” (2007, p. 73). Therefore, it is appropriate to reiterate the purpose of this research briefly before describing the research design in detail.

Through this research project I intend to describe and analyse in detail what happens in a particular school when reading is taught in Grade 1. As Chapter 2 shows, there is little published classroom-level research which explores this in South Africa. I hope that my observations and analysis will contribute to deepening our knowledge base about early literacy teaching practice in South Africa. In so doing, I hope also to throw light on classroom practices in Grade 1 which might be linked to poor performance in literacy in higher grades. As such this is applied research aiming to assist curriculum developers in Institutions of Higher Education and policy makers in understanding the problems they are dealing with and in proposing workable solutions. My intention through this research is also to draw attention to how vital the early years of schooling are to the successful development of the fundamental set of skills upon which all further study is based, and to make a case for the diversion of resources and energy towards the effective teaching of reading in Grade 1 classrooms.

The aims of the research are:

1. To capture the understandings and practices of the Grade 1 teachers in the study regarding the initial teaching of reading through an additional language in a typically marginalised context in South Africa.
2. To construct a rich, reflective, holistic account of the teaching of the reading in the study and to present this account in terms of theories about learning to read.
3. To draw from this recommendations for initial and continuing teacher education.

The following primary research questions guided the research:

1. How do the Grade 1 teachers in this case teach reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in this practice?
2. What are the stated beliefs of teachers in this case regarding the teaching of reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in their beliefs?
3. How do teachers' beliefs about teaching reading relate to their observed and reported practice?
4. What do the texts displayed in classrooms reveal about the teaching of reading in those classrooms?
5. Can the texts displayed in a classroom be used as an effective way of revealing how teachers teach literacy?
6. What does this case study illuminate for consideration in relation to initial and continuing teacher professional development of early reading teachers?

By exploring these issues I hope to make a contribution to the field of reading education in South Africa by constructing an account of early reading pedagogy.

4.3 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

While I discuss ontological and epistemological issues in Section 4.4.1 below, it is appropriate at this point to reflect on and acknowledge that my own positionality might have affected this research process (Harvey, 1996; Greenbank, 2003). No research is neutral. I do not believe that it is either possible or desirable to entirely eliminate researcher effects. Values, both recognised and unrecognised, are involved in identifying research problems,

designing research, collecting and analysing data, writing, and using research (May 2001). My age, gender, race, class, cultural, religious and political views, education, home language, personal experiences, professional experiences, power and social status are among the influences on my values and thus have the potential to influence, for example, how I ask questions as well as how research participants respond to those questions. Acknowledging the subjective in research contributes to its trustworthiness.

In many ways I was different from the participants in this research. I am a middle aged, English-speaking, non-religious woman who grew up in an economically, socially and politically privileged and highly literate context in apartheid-era South Africa and who currently works in an Institute of Higher Learning. I believe that it is important for young children to have many rich and pleasant experiences with reading, and I am myself an avid reader. I have already outlined, in Section 1.8, my own theoretical position in relation to the reading process. While it was not possible for me to bracket out these subjectivities, I was continually aware of them in carrying out this research, and continually asked myself how my own positionality was affecting how I behaved and how the participants responded, particularly during classroom observation and interviews. My decision to employ participatory research methodologies in this study was motivated, as set out in more detail in Section 4.4.6, by an attempt to deal with these subjectivities. Similarly, my familiarity with the case, detailed in Section 4.4.5, is likely to have reduced the extent to which children and teachers “performed” in my presence and thus increased the trustworthiness of the study.

4.4 BROAD ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

This study could broadly be described as an interpretative, qualitatively dominant case study. Each of these components is considered in more detail below.

4.4.1 Ontology, epistemology and methodology

The dominant approach in educational research has been to argue that coherence of research design is achieved by ensuring that the purposes and techniques of the research framework fit within a particular “research paradigm” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 71). Paradigms are generally defined as systems of interrelated assumptions about ontology (the form and

nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known), and methodology (how the inquirer goes about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known) (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 36). The concept of “paradigm” is variously used, depending on conceptions of the interrelationship and relative importance of ontology, epistemology and methodology (Morgan, 2007, pp. 50-54). When ontology is privileged, “paradigm” is seen as a world-view, an all-encompassing way of thinking about and experiencing the world. When epistemology is privileged, “paradigm” takes on a different stress. Perhaps the most widespread way of using the term in the social sciences is as an epistemological stance. Alternatively, “paradigm” can be seen in terms of shared beliefs among members of a specialty area. Finally, the concept “paradigm” can be used in the sense of models or methods of research. Morgan stresses that these versions of the concept paradigm are not mutually exclusive but nested within one another. He argues that none of these versions is “right” or “wrong”: “The question is which version is most appropriate for any given purpose?” (Morgan, 2007, p. 54). In other words, Morgan proposes a pragmatic view of the term paradigm. This is the approach I take in this research.

Historically, Guba and Lincoln (1994) have been most influential in comparing research paradigms in the social sciences. Their early work delineated two paradigms, namely positivism and “naturalistic inquiry”, later termed constructivism. Subsequently they expanded their list of paradigms to include post-positivism, critical theory, and the participatory paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I appreciate Morgan’s criticism that Guba and Lincoln’s approach to paradigms is “top-down” and “metaphysical” because they privilege ontological issues over epistemological and methodological issues, which “impose[s] limits on every aspect of the system” (Morgan, 2007, pp. 57-58). I find Morgan’s position satisfies much of the prickly response I have to Guba and Lincoln’s metaphysical perspective, and therefore quote at length:

Paradigms in social science research methodologies are not abstract entities with timeless characteristics; instead what counts as a paradigm and how the core content of the paradigm is portrayed involves a series of ongoing struggles between competing interest groups. Yet if the content of paradigms is subject to this level of human agency, then it makes little sense to claim that principles such as ontology, epistemology and methodology are actually defining characteristics for such paradigms. This shift from a view of paradigms as enduring epistemological stances to dynamic systems of belief within a community of scholars calls into question the metaphysical paradigm’s basic attempt to ‘impose order’ on the practices in social science research through an externally defined, a priori system from the philosophy of knowledge. (Morgan, 2007, p. 61)

I agree with Morgan's position. I regard paradigms as human constructions, and think that Guba and Lincoln's categorisation of research paradigms is too rigid because my own ontological, epistemological and methodological preferences do not fit neatly into the categories popularised by Guba and Lincoln. Human thought and belief cannot so easily be boxed. I feel far more comfortable with a conception of a continuum of approaches to research (see Figure 10 below) and with combining research methods to obtain richer data, where the purpose of the research indicates this.

Broadly speaking, this research was conducted from an interpretive, anti-positivist perspective. Interpretive research is subjective, small-scale, non-statistical, interprets individual specificities, aims to understand actions and meanings rather than causes, and focuses on micro-concepts such as individual perspectives, personal constructs or negotiated meanings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). It sees the researcher making efforts to understand the human experience "from within" – to interpret the world in terms of its actors. Interpretive approaches focus on action, which Cohen et al. see as "behaviour-with-meaning" (2007, p. 21). However, increasingly, researchers are accepting that qualitative research can attribute causes (Maxwell, 2004), a position with which I agree. Interpretivist research is naturalistic in that it is context-dependent and happens in an unobtrusive manner in uncontrived, real-world settings (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). However, I concur with Bernstein (1974) that there is a danger that such an approach can neglect the role of structural (i.e. external) forces on behaviour and events, so my perspective is not purely interpretive. In addition, my research approach could be described as critical in that it aims not simply to describe the world, but also to play a role in changing it into something more egalitarian and democratic, and in that it sees the importance of political and social power relations and looks at both macro- and micro-concepts. From a pragmatic perspective it is legitimate for a piece of research to embody these various perspectives.

My personal beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) fit in with what the sociologist Moore calls "critical realism" which focuses on the social relations of the production of knowledge (Moore, 2004, p. 149). My epistemological beliefs, which briefly put, would hold that the researcher cannot be completely objective (my own values and habitus influence this enquiry, no matter how much I attempt to bracket them), could also be described as fitting in with what Guba and Lincoln call "critical theory and related ideological positions" (1994, p. 110).

Epistemology is perhaps more central to reading research than to other areas of education research precisely because reading is a way of knowing (J. W. Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996). As was argued in Chapter 2, what is sometimes construed as debate over methods of reading instruction is often at base an issue of different epistemological stances. Epistemological issues impact on what people see as the most important thing to teach about reading, how reading should be taught and how reading comprehension should be tested. Such issues are, for example:

- Can we have knowledge of a single reality that is independent of the knower?
- Is there such a thing as truth?
- What primary test must proposed knowledge pass in order to be true (correspondence, coherence or pragmatism)?
- Is knowledge primarily universal or particular?
- Where is knowledge located relative to the knower – outside, between or inside or a dualist or pluralist combination of these?
- What are the relative contributions of sense data and mental activity to knowing?
- To what degree is knowledge discovered or created?

My own stance is that meaning evolves through a reciprocal relationship between the mind of the reader/author and the text, that the signs on the page transact (Rosenblatt, 1994), that there is no definite meaning external to the transaction, that knowledge is created and recreated, that the reading process is universal, but every reading is unique and that the test of truth of knowledge is pragmatism, rather than coherence or accurate correspondence.

4.4.2 The research as a case study

I chose to conduct this research as a case study for a number of reasons. First, the methodology provides a way of developing deeper insight into the issue of how reading is taught in South Africa by focusing intensely on a defined, limited instance of the teaching of reading. Second, case studies can open up complex and unique relationships, interactions and systems connected to the object of investigation. Third, case studies are “a step to action” (Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 256): they study action and contribute to it. Fourth, case studies are responsive types of study, and can accommodate unanticipated events. Fifth, case studies are an appropriate kind of research for single researchers, such as myself, to carry out. Finally,

case studies as products are easier for varied audiences to understand and may therefore have greater impact with a broad range of stakeholders than some other types of research (Bassey, 1999).

Case studies are not uniformly understood (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Indeed when researchers talk about case studies they may mean the process of studying the case, the unit of study, or the product of this investigation (Merriam, 1998). Rule and John (forthcoming) suggest that case studies can also be understood as a particular genre of writing. This is a case study in all these senses of the term. Bassey (1999) provides a comprehensive review of the way authors have defined case studies, but it is Bassey's own formulation of what an educational case study is that has influenced my thinking in this research:

An educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is: conducted within a localised boundary of space and time (i.e. a singularity); into interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system; mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons; in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy makers; or of theoreticians who are working to these ends; in such a way that sufficient data are collected. (Bassey, 1999, p. 58)

As specified in this definition, the present case study is a study of singularity, namely the teaching of reading in a particular set of classrooms in a particular school at a particular time. It is bounded by category (the pedagogy of teaching reading), space (Grade 1 classrooms in one particular mainstream school in KwaZulu-Natal), time (2006) and theme (*Teaching reading for meaning?*). In other words, my interest is in how meaning is positioned in the pedagogy studied). The case (or the unit of analysis) is the teaching of reading in Grade 1 at one particular school. There were three Grade 1 teachers in this school, but I conceptualised them as part of the same case, as opposed to each being a different case. This illustrates another feature of case studies, namely that the researcher is active in "imagining" the case (Bassey, 1999), selecting the focus of the study and thus "constructing" the case. The focus within the study was the knowledge, beliefs and practices of the Grade 1 teachers in relation to the teaching of reading. Embedded units of analysis (John & Rule, in press) are the teachers' knowledge about teaching reading, the teachers' beliefs about teaching reading and the teachers' practices when teaching reading. This particular instance is a case of the teaching of reading in South African schools, and contributes to a deeper understanding of the wider phenomenon of teaching reading in South Africa.

Other features of Bassey's definition of a case study are also present in my study. It is indeed an empirical study, based on data collection. The teaching of reading was studied in its natural context, and with respect for the people involved (see Section 4.3.7 below). It is hoped that the findings will be of interest and relevance to policy makers, practitioners and academics. Stake (2005) argues that case studies should develop rich contextual data regarding the economic, political, legal, and other contexts. Chapter 3 of this dissertation contextualises the teaching of reading in South Africa in this way, and in Chapter 5 the context of the school and the particular teachers in the study is described.

In this study a large amount of data was generated, which enabled in-depth, intensive inquiry which reflects the rich reality of the case. The research focused on teachers – what they did, what they believed and how they explained their actions. While some information was gathered from stakeholders such as the school principal and learners, the study did not aim to explore the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders.

Different authors have delineated different types of case study. While different terminology is used, the key issue is whether the researcher is primarily interested in the case itself, or in illuminating the issue it exemplifies.

This study can be categorised as a theory-seeking case study (Bassey, 1999, pp. 62-63), which is similar to what Stake (1995) calls an instrumental case study or what Yin (1994) refers to as an exploratory case study. As opposed to intrinsic studies (Stake, 1995), such studies attempt to throw light on an issue which is more general than the case itself. They are instruments for the understanding of a wider issue. The issue is identified first, and then cases which exemplify this issue are identified and explored. My interest in this case is largely instrumental. While I am interested in how teachers teach reading in this school in and of itself, because I have been associated with the school and the teachers for a substantial length of time, my research was driven by a desire to use this case to contribute to an understanding of how reading is taught in South Africa in general.

The present study could also be described as a picture-drawing study because it uses descriptive rather than narrative techniques (Bassey, 1999, pp. 62-63).

4.4.3 The research as a qualitatively dominant mixed method study

I wrote in Chapter 2 about the tendency in the past for reading researchers and theorists to search for one, superior, way of viewing the reading process. This manifested in “the reading wars” pitting bottom-up and top-down theories and teaching methods against one another in a sometimes acrimonious manner. A resolution to this theoretical dualism came with interactive, dual route models which acknowledged the importance of attention to letters and sounds as well as meaning in the reading process. This resolution was made philosophically possible by the work begun by Thomas Kuhn (1970) on the nature of change in science.

Kuhn also had a major impact on the philosophical “war” regarding what counts as knowledge and valid research, manifested in the research community as tensions between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. As in the case of theories about the reading process, a resolution of this dualism is being developed through mixed method (also referred to as mixed mode, multi-strategy, multi-trait, multi-method, or mixed model) research. In Chapter 2 I took a stance for dual-route understandings of the reading process and it is therefore congruent that I understood and conducted this research project from the perspective of mixed method research.

In designing this study, I was interested in “observing and asking questions in real-world settings” (Patton, 1987, p. 21) and in “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world, and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). As research design needs to fit the purpose of the research, I was therefore attracted to qualitative research, agreeing with Creswell that “qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparison to quantitative research” (2007, p. 11). However, I agree with Miles and Huberman who argue that “at bottom, we have to face the fact that numbers and words are *both* needed if we are to understand the world” (1994, p. 40), and that quantitative data can complement qualitative data in a study. I therefore explored the value of mixed method research and ended up designing this research project in mixed-method terms. This is wholly legitimate in case study research.

Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner (2007) analyse the definitions of mixed methods research given by 19 leading mixed methods researchers. They identify a number of key themes in all the definitions given and use these themes to arrive at the following general definition:

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. the use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (R. B. Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123)

In an influential scheme, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989, p. 259) identify five purposes for mixed-method research. On the basis of reviews of reasons given in methodological and research articles for using mixed methods, Niglas (2004, cited in Bryman, 2006, p. 105) developed a different, eighteen-category scheme, but I will use Greene et al. to categorise the present research. The purposes for mixed-method research identified by Greene et al. are: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion. Triangulation seeks convergence, corroboration and correspondence of results across methods. Complementarity seeks “elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification” (Greene et al., 1989, p. 259) of results from one method with results of the other. Development aims to use the result of one method to help develop (sample, implement, measure) the other. Initiation looks for recasting of questions or results from one method with questions or results from the other. Expansion aims to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods. In terms of these purposes, my reasons for choosing to undertake mixed methods research were, using this scheme, primarily to seek complementarity and triangulation.

Greene et al. posit that “The core premise of triangulation as a design strategy is that all methods have inherent biases and limitations, so use of only one method to assess a given phenomenon will inevitably yield biased and limited results” (1989, p. 256). In my research, the primary method of data collection was the transect walk through classrooms focusing on texts used in teaching reading. My main assumption was that through close examination of texts in the classrooms I would be able to access how teachers teach reading. However, the transect walk was potentially limited as a data collection method by the assumptions that all texts used in teaching reading would be displayed; that teachers would be able to articulate their use of texts in their teaching; and that a friendly, conversational relationship between the researcher and the teachers would facilitate full access to data about how teachers teach reading. In order to counter such potential limitations, methodological triangulation enabled

similar data to be gathered through a questionnaire and interviews. These research methodologies had their own, different, biases, but the fact that the data collected through all three methods was coherent, as will be detailed in Chapter 5, increases the validity of the research.

The relative strength accorded to qualitative and quantitative methods in mixed methods research, as well as the point(s) in the research at which these different methods are used distinguishes different types of mixed method research. The interplay of qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis in this study is illustrated in Figures 10 and 11. Greater detail of the design of these components in this study is provided in Figure 12 which follows. Figure 10 shows how my research is **qualitatively dominant**, and Figure 11 illustrates how the quantitative component is less important and embellishes what is essentially a qualitative study.

Figure 10: Continuum of research paradigms
(adapted from R. B. Johnson et al., 2007, p. 124)

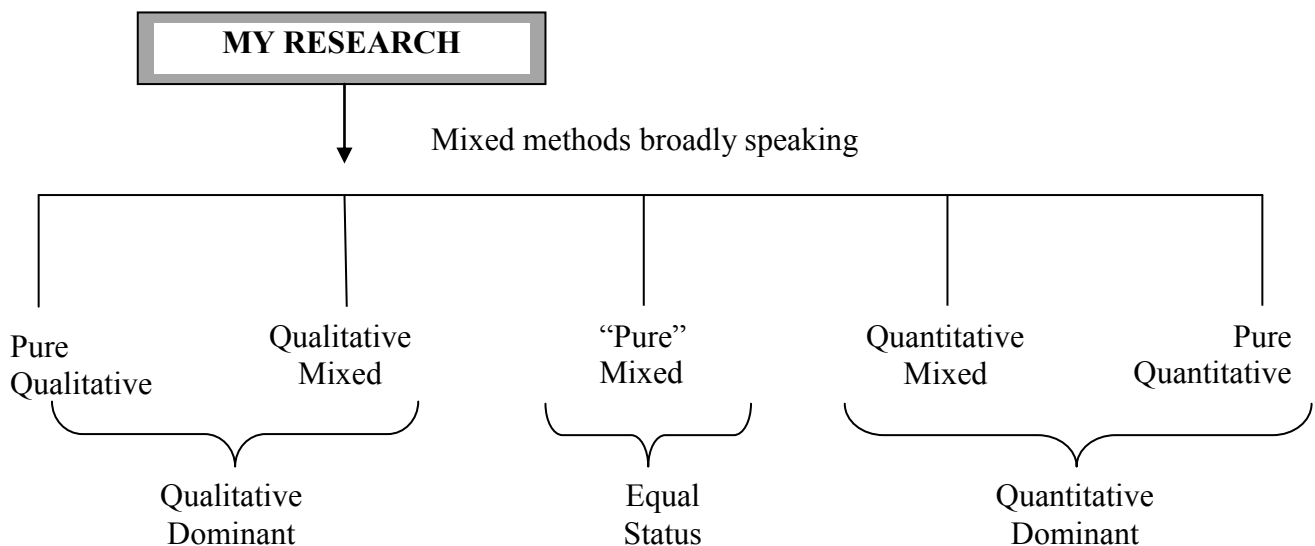
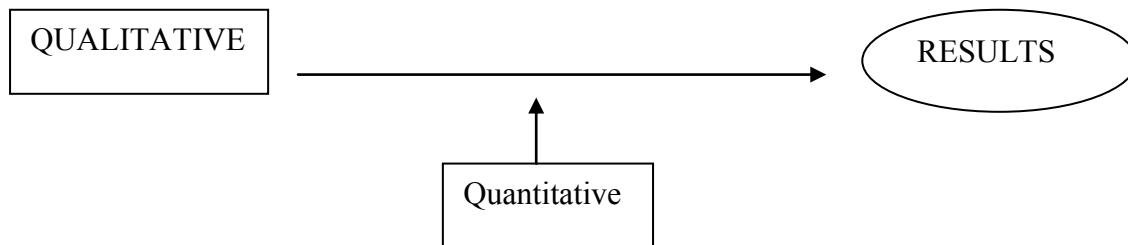


Figure 11: Visual representation of quantitative methods used to embellish a primarily qualitative study

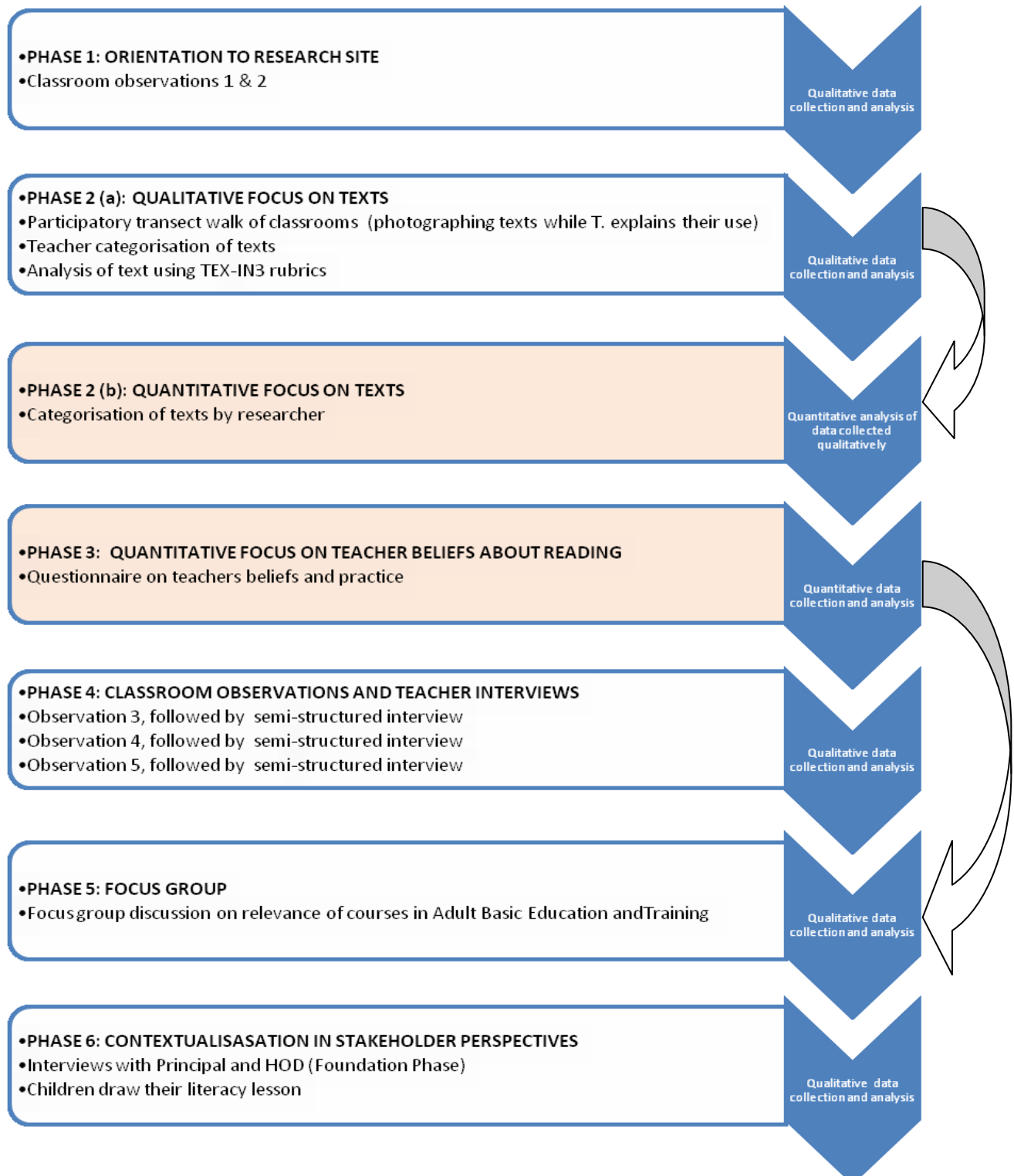
(adapted from J.W. Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 214)



A key consideration in mixed method research is when and how the qualitative and quantitative components relate to one another. Although the specific design of this research will be covered in detail later in this chapter, a flow chart showing the phases of the study is included at this point in Figure 12 in order to illustrate the interplay between qualitative and quantitative research in this project.

In Onwuegbuzie & Johnson's typology (2006), mixed method research design can be concurrent mixed, sequential mixed, conversion, parallel or fully mixed design types. My research was largely a **concurrent mixed design** in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected separately at approximately the same time. In Figure 12, this is exemplified in research phases 3 (Quantitative data collection about the beliefs of teachers about teaching) and 4 (Qualitative classroom observations). However, neither set of data built on the other during the data analysis stage and results were not consolidated until both sets of data had been separately collected and analysed. After data from each component had been interpreted, a meta-inference was drawn which integrated the two sets of data (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p. 53). In addition, parts of the study exhibited **sequential mixed design**, in which data from one phase informed another phase of the study, as in the case of the questionnaire used in phase 3 which threw up the fact that two of the three teachers had been trained as ABET teachers, leading to the setting up of a group discussion to explore this aspect further in phase 5 of the research. In Figure 12, this is indicated by the curved arrows linking phases of the study together. These examples illustrate the recursive and iterative nature of the research process.

Figure 12: Phases of research to explore the teaching of reading in this case



4.4.4 Trustworthiness

A persistent debate in relation to the study of singularities, such as a case study, is about validity, reliability and generalisability. While these concepts apply to positivist research, researchers question their applicability to qualitative research (Bassey, 1999; Patton, 2002; Stenbacka, 2001). These debates arise out of what Simons (1996, p. 238) called “the paradox of case study,” namely:

The tension between the study of the unique and the need to generalise is necessary to reveal both the unique and the universal and the unity of that understanding. To live with ambiguity, to challenge certainty, to creatively encounter, is to arrive, eventually at ‘seeing’ anew.

In quantitative research, reliability is concerned with whether the results can be consistently reproduced over time (Golafshani, 2003, pp. 598-599). Lincoln and Guba prefer to use the term “dependability” in connection with qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). Their concern is whether the research produces quality data, for which they see consistency/dependability and applicability/ transferability as criteria. Validity, a closely related concept, is about how accurate, true, sound, just and believable the results of research are. In positivist research it is concerned with whether the means of data collection is accurate and whether it measures what it was intended to measure. Lincoln and Guba argue that a demonstration of validity establishes reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Reliability and validity in qualitative research are conceptualised in terms of trustworthiness, rigour and quality (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604)

The concept of “trustworthiness” of case study research depends, according to Bassey (1999, p. 76, drawing on Lincoln and Guba, 1985) on:

- Prolonged engagement with data sources;
- Persistent observation of emerging issues;
- Adequate checking of data with the sources;
- Systematic testing of the emerging story against analytical statements;
- Attempts by a critical friend to challenge the findings;
- A sufficiently detailed account of the research which gives the reader confidence in the findings;
- An adequate audit trail in the case record.

Out of this list, all elements except the one concerning the involvement of a critical friend were present in this study (recognising, of course, that there are subjective judgements involved in “adequate”, “prolonged” or “persistent”). In addition, the reliability of the study was increased by the use of multiple methods to study a single issue, obtaining data from different sources and the use of multiple methods for recording data, which allowed for both methodological and data triangulation. Further, the use of flexible observation schedules, which minimised the impact of unconscious biases, my prolonged and historical engagement with the school which reduced the Hawthorne effect and the use of low-inference vocabulary in the written record (in other words, avoiding judgement by the strong use of vocabulary) contributed to the trustworthiness of this research.

Various ideas about the generalisability of case studies have been raised. Yin argued that theory should be developed from case studies, and that this should happen by means of analytic generalisation: “A previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed” (Yin, 1994, p. 31). This is what I propose in the final chapter of this thesis. In relation to case studies, Stenhouse talked about retrospective generalisation (similar to Yin’s analytic generalisation), which “seek(s) to strengthen individual judgement where it cannot be superseded” (Stenhouse, 1988, cited in Bassey, 1999, p.32). Stake (1995) came up with the idea of *petites* rather than *grandes* generalisations for case studies. Petites generalisations are located within the case study. Stake used the concept of “naturalistic generalisations” (1995, p. 86) which are made by the readers of case study reports on the basis of the “vicarious experience” of having read the rich account of the case, but argued that the researcher could also make “propositional generalisations” to provide direction to the reader’s naturalistic generalisation.

Bassey proposes the concepts of “fuzzy generalisation” and “fuzzy proposition” (generalisations are more certain than propositions) in relation to theory-seeking studies of singularities. Such generalisations would claim that it is *possible*, or *likely*, or *unlikely* that something that was found in the study of the singularity would be found in similar situations elsewhere (1999, p. 12). Fuzzy generalisations are statements with built-in uncertainty, and they are made without any statement of probability. Bassey, who is particularly concerned about the fact that much research in educational settings is not read by teachers and therefore often does not find its way to influencing classroom practice, suggests that case study reports

should end with a “sound bite” encapsulating the fuzzy generalisation of the study (Bassey, 1999, p. 91). Bassey goes on to propose that an “audit certificate” should be written for published case studies. This would be a written statement of the professional judgement of a critical reader that the conclusions of the case study report are based firmly on the data collected, and that the data analysis was appropriate, sufficient and ethical. In the case of an academic thesis, such as this, examiners’ reports serve this function, though they are not accessible to the general public. Bassey’s contention is that the generalisability of case-study findings can be increased by encouraging other researchers to replicate published case studies in different contexts. In this way firmer conclusions may be drawn regarding generalisability. I believe that this approach warrants exploration by journals and academics.

4.4.5 Choice of the case

This is a single-case rather than multi-case study. The criteria I used in selecting the case were:

- Facilities, language policy and socio-economic context were typical of mainstream schools in KwaZulu-Natal;
- Teachers and principal were willing to participate in the study;
- Ease of access of researcher to the school;
- Familiarity of the researcher with the school and vice versa.

In the year prior to this research, I had been involved in organizing a Continuing Teacher Professional Development workshop for local teachers, held at the school which was the focus of this study. In addition I had spent three hours every week at the school reading stories to the children. This work continued for another four years, including throughout the period of the research. Consequently, I had come to care about and be interested in the school. I was well-known by staff and students alike and I reasoned that this would facilitate the kind of naturalistic, non-manipulative, non-controlling research I wanted to carry out, in which the power relation between myself as researcher and research participants was to some extent flattened. Thus while the case was chosen to some extent for familiarity and convenience, its selection was also purposive as I regarded the school as typical of other cases in its class and as it provided an opportunity for participatory research.

Within this school, no sampling occurred in relation to the teachers who were the main sources of data for my investigation. All the Grade 1 teachers in the school participated in the project, with the backing of the school management team.

4.4.6 Rationale for the use of participatory research methodologies

An important concern of mine in designing this study was to level the power relations between myself and the participants in the research process. I had a strong sense that unless I achieved this, the data gathered and the analysis would be skewed. I incorporated participatory research methodologies into the design of both data collection and data analysis, in an attempt to give direct voice to the participants and to involve them in both production and analysis of data. Such participatory methodologies were employed in Phase 2(a) of the study, as illustrated in Figure 12. I adapted common participatory methods for data collection and analysis, such as the transect walk and participatory categorisation exercises, from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 1994). PRA (subsequently known by other names as well, such as Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rapid Appraisal) takes as its starting point the question, “Whose knowledge counts?” (Chambers, 1994, p. 957) and seeks to enable outsiders to gain information and insight from locals (or, in this case participants in the research process). Participatory research involves people in the research process not as objects but as active participants in defining issues, systematising and articulating their own knowledge, analysing data using research methods which they understand, reflecting and working out solutions. Knowledge belongs to the researched and they benefit from the research process. Interaction with the outside researcher may help them to link their own experience to external experiences, improve their access to new information and assist them in the collection and analysis of data.

I attempted to establish supportive, non-authoritarian relationships with the participants and actively encouraged them to question my perspectives. The fact that I had no experience teaching Grade 1, and have a background in adult education enabled me to position the participating teachers more as “experts” in our relationship, and myself as a “learner” about teaching beginning reading. This positioning was, however, never complete: the subtle power differences between white and black, between English first and second language speakers, between Foundation Phase teachers and teacher educators, between insiders and outsiders,

continued to influence my relationships in this research, despite the implementation of strategies to reduce or counteract our differences.

My use of participatory research methodologies (for both data collection and data analysis) was, however, not only motivated by the desire to make the participants' knowledge count, and to give them power in the research context by inviting them to "hold the pen." The use of these methodologies was also a strategy to enable me to develop an understanding of a process which takes place over the course of a year, without necessitating intensive and extended observation of lessons. One of my research questions was "Can a teacher's method of teaching reading be discerned from her discussion and analysis of texts visible in her classroom?" and an early title for this study was "Reading the Writing on the Walls."

4.4.7 Ethical considerations

Field research has been described as "an act of betrayal, no matter how well intentioned or well integrated the researcher. One makes public the private and leaves the locals to take the consequences" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 265). Since I knew the participating teachers relatively well, this was a huge concern for me as I conducted this research and particularly as I wrote up the dissertation. I was acutely aware of the trust and sacrifice that these teachers made in allowing me to document and write about their work, which made me all the more convinced of the need to let their voices and work shine through the research through rich description.

This research was designed according to widely accepted philosophical principles regarding ethics in research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 66), namely the principles of autonomy and the respect for dignity of persons (voluntary and informed participation and rights to anonymity in the research publication), non-maleficence (inflicting no physical, emotional, social or other harm) and beneficence (designing the research to be of some benefit to the participants and /or the society at large).

Permission to do the research in the school was formally granted by the KZN Department of Education, the School Governing Body, the School Principal, and the School Management Team. Ethical Clearance for my Master's research was applied for and granted by the Faculty

Higher Degrees Committee and as no new instruments, subjects or foci were introduced in the PhD, no further Ethical Clearance was necessary (see APPENDIX 1 for the Ethical Clearance Certificate granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal).

The research process began with a meeting with the school principal. The project was explained, and permission was sought to conduct the research in the Grade 1 classrooms. The principal discussed this with the individual teachers and obtained their consent to be involved. I then met with all the Grade 1 teachers and the principal to explain the purpose of the research and to answer questions about the research process. Teachers were given written documentation about the research project to read at home before agreeing to be involved by signing declarations of informed consent. Participating children's parents also signed forms giving permission for their children to take part in a study regarding the teaching of literacy, and the purpose of the research was carefully explained to the children (see Appendix 2 for informed consent forms for teachers and parents and assent forms for children).

Although the consent forms promised anonymity, the School Principal and the teachers concerned had no objection to the school or the individual teachers being identified in this thesis. Nevertheless, since their identities are not essential to the study, I have decided to refer to the school and the participating teachers by pseudonyms.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION

4.5.1 Overview

The data was gathered between July and the end of November 2006. Figure 12 above provides an overview of the process of this research and shows that it was based on multiple sources of data. Reviews of literature about the relationship of teacher's beliefs to their practice, cited in Chapter 2, suggest that multimethod approaches allowing for triangulation of data are necessary to analyse teachers' beliefs. Pajares (1992, p. 327) argues that belief inventories must be complemented by interviews, responses to dilemmas and observation of behaviour.

The main data collection methods employed in this study were a participatory transect walk of classrooms focusing on texts for teaching beginning reading; classroom observations; teacher interviews; and the administration of a questionnaire about the teaching of reading. Through these data collection methods, both data triangulation and methodological triangulation were possible.

A summary of data collection strategies is given below in Figure 13. This is followed by more detailed descriptions of each strategy, including discussion of theory relating to the data collection methods employed in this research. Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously and recursively, so Figure 13 also indicates data analysis strategies, although these are discussed in section 4.6. Data collection methods relate to the purpose of the research.

Figure 13: Data collection and analysis strategies

Data Collection Strategy	Research participant (s)	Data collection instrument	Information sought	Data recording method	Data analysis method
Phase 1: Orientation					
Classroom observation 1 (1 full day per class x 3 classrooms)	Teachers and children in classroom	None	General. Purpose was to orient me to the context and to suggest themes for further exploration. Also to start getting the children used to my presence in the classroom and modus operandi with camera, notebooks and audiotape recorder.	Camera Audiotape recording Field notes	Preliminary identification of themes and categories by global analysis
Classroom observation 2 (1/2 day per class x 3)	Teachers and children	None	Focused specifically on observing texts in the classroom and how they were used – suggestion of themes for exploration	Field notes	Preliminary identification of themes and categories by global analysis
Phase 2: Focus on use of texts					
Transect walk (after school, only teacher and researcher present x 3).	Teachers	Protocol for transect walk (see Appendix 3)	Teachers' understanding of the texts needed to teach reading and their explanation of how texts are used	Photographs of all texts	a)Qualitative analysis
					Participatory artefact analysis of photographs: Teachers group and rank photos of texts in terms of usefulness, time, purpose (see Appendix 9) Application of TEX-IN 3 analytical rubrics by researcher (see Appendix 11 and Appendix 12)

Data Collection Strategy	Research participant (s)	Data collection instrument	Information sought	Data recording method	Data analysis method
					b) Quantitative analysis
					Categorisation of photos of text by researcher in terms of categories derived from theoretical orientations to reading.
Phase 3: Focus on teacher beliefs about reading					
Questionnaire	Teachers	Modified TORP questionnaire administered via five-pile sorting and written questionnaire (see explanation of administration method below) (see Appendix 4)	Teacher's beliefs about the reading process and about appropriate reading teaching practice; Biographical information: Teacher's own reading habits.	Participants recording on questionnaire response sheet	a) Quantitative analysis
					Analysis of responses in terms of 3 orientations to reading theory
Phase 4: Focus on classroom practice and pedagogy					
Non-participant Classroom observations 3, 4, & 5 (3 x 2 ½ hours of observation, over a three-month period x 3 teachers)	Teachers	Audio recording Field notes Checklist of metalanguage used in lesson (see Table 5 and checklist for classroom observation in Appendix 5)	What do teachers do when they teach reading?	Audio recording Field notes Metalanguage checklist	Content analysis for themes; Identification of illustrative excerpts for careful transcription and translation of isiZulu ; Manual coding of transcripts of lessons;
Semi-structured interviews (during lunch break directly following each of observations 3, 4 & 5)	Teachers	Interview schedule (see Appendix 6)	What do teachers do when they teach reading?	Audio-recording Field notes	Content analysis

Phase 5 : Focus on teacher training					
Semi-structured group interview	2 teachers who had been trained in ABET	Protocol for group discussion (see Appendix 7)	Value of ABET training for teaching Grade 1 children to read;	Audio-recording Field notes	Content analysis
Phase 6: Stakeholder perspectives					
Semi-structured interview	Principal and Head of Department (Foundation Phase)	Interview schedule (see Appendix 8)	Profile of the school, school-wide literacy strategies and language policy	Field notes	Content analysis
Drawing	Children in 2 classes	Drawings of their literacy classes	Perceptions of children about how they learn literacy	None	Content analysis
Curriculum document analysis	Curriculum and related documents	Not applicable	Specification of how literacy should be taught	None	Content analysis

4.5.2 Transect walk

A transect walk is a sort of mobile, conversational, unstructured interview. Commonly used in participatory research, and often resulting in the drawing of a transect map, transect walks involve participants walking through a community dialoguing about the significant areas, functions and artefacts to be found on this transect (Mukherjee, 1993, p. 52). Through this method, the teachers were as the experts (van der Riet, 2008) on what occurred in their classrooms. Resources, problems and local technologies can be identified. This kind of interview is relaxed, natural, almost completely open-ended, informal, non-structured and conversational, and has the advantage of building on, and emerging from, observations (Cohen et.al., 2007, p.353).

I chose to conduct a transect walk because I was not in a position spend a year observing how teachers teach reading in this study. I therefore sought a means of uncovering how they teach reading which would not be so time-intensive. I reasoned that, by careful analysis of texts present on the classroom walls, I would be able to uncover in a relatively short time period how reading is taught. I set out to record all the texts to which learners have access on the assumption that the texts present (both visible and out of sight) in the classroom would reflect the methodologies used to teach reading and the relative emphasis of the teacher on different dimensions of the reading process. The recording of text in the classroom occurred on one particular day, but changes and additions were monitored over the course of six months. Teachers were also asked to share texts which they used but which were not immediately visible.

A rough protocol for the transect walks was prepared (see Appendix 3). I met each teacher after school and asked her to “walk me round the classroom,” explaining the function and significance to the teaching of reading of each item of text visible in the room. Each artefact or item of text was photographed for the purpose of data analysis by teachers themselves through various participatory analysis exercises, as well as by myself through quantitative categorisation of texts. I asked questions about the resources (such as questions about when and how they were used and under what conditions of access) while actually observing them. I recorded these explanations in field notes and photographed every item for use in participatory analysis exercises, namely grouping, ranking, and time-line activities.

I audio-taped the teacher's commentaries. Audio-taping, in this aspect of data collection as in others in this study, was conducted to help keep a full record of the event, without distraction of note-taking. However, I also jotted down notes which were useful in making sense of the audiotapes in the analysis stage. One teacher (Ms G.) appeared to be intimidated by the presence of the tape recorder and after discussion with her I turned the recorder off and relied on field notes for recording in her classroom. Teachers' commentaries also served as part of the participatory data analysis of texts.

4.5.3 Questionnaire on beliefs about teaching reading

Questionnaires are usually used to gather data from a large number of participants (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000, p. 108). Questionnaires allow respondents time to think about their answers, and can be completed at the respondent's convenience. The effect of the interviewer's attitudes or presence is minimised through use of questionnaires. They are uniform and free of variation. However, they do not allow probing, prompting and clarification of questions (Sarantakos, 2005, p.263). There are many different types of questionnaire, including standardised (in which respondents cannot formulate answers they way they want to) unstandardised or open ended (free answer) and semistandardised. Questionnaires which make use of rating scales such as Likert scales or semantic differential scales are undoubtedly useful, but as Cohen et al. (2007, p.327) point out they have their limitations too, including the tendency of respondents to avoid extreme positions. The wording of questionnaires is crucial and piloting is crucial (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 341)

The questionnaire instrument used in this study is included in Appendix 4. The questionnaire had three chief purposes. Part 1 aimed to gather background information regarding each teacher. Part 2 aimed to investigate the participant's own reading habits, in the belief that these influence the way the teachers would teach reading. Part 3 aimed to uncover teacher's beliefs about and practices teaching reading. This information could also have been gained through interviews, but I wished to enable methodological triangulation and therefore opted for a more quantitative approach. Part 1 of the questionnaire provided a quick way of recording teacher biographical details. Parts 2 and 3 enabled the gathering and easy analysis of information in a standardised way, which I reasoned would be helpful in researching beliefs and attitudes, which could be expressed very differently by individuals. The use of a rating scale in the questionnaire enabled me to find out how strongly the teachers held

particular beliefs or attitudes. The use of a questionnaire also assisted in reducing the influence of my own opinions on the data, as teachers could not be influenced by my oral and nonverbal signals. In addition, a data collection instrument which had been tested and validated in other contexts was available for use to uncover teacher's beliefs, and I opted to use this in this phase of the research.

The instrument I used to uncover teacher beliefs and practices in Part 3 of the questionnaire was slightly adapted from an instrument developed by Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell and Wray (2001) as part of their investigation of "effective" literacy teachers in Britain. They in turn had adapted the de Ford (1985) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) instrument (which is discussed, together with other measures of teacher orientation/belief, in Chapter 2 of this thesis) by reducing the number of statements used, simplifying and de-Americanising the language. The TORP only investigated reading and Poulson et al. added a set of parallel statements about beliefs and useful strategies for teaching writing. Poulson et al. used this questionnaire to indicate "orientation" of teachers, or the extent to which they were drawn to particular ideas. The questionnaire contains two attitude statements for each of the following orientations to reading theory: phonic (bottom-up) orientation, word (sight word) orientation and meaning or communication (top-down) orientation. For writing, the instrument has two statements for each of the following orientations: presentation (associated with the bottom-up approach and focusing on spelling and handwriting), process (associated with the top-down approach and emphasising engagement with whole text) and forms/purpose (emphasising vocabulary choice, sentence organisation and the purpose of writing) orientations. The instrument also illuminates the extent to which the teachers' beliefs are consistent with what they actually do in the classroom (Poulson et al., 2001; Wray et al., 2002). A five-point Likert scale was used in this instrument. In part 2 of the questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale was also used to gather information about the teachers' own reading habits. The questionnaire concluded with two open-ended questions regarding what children need to learn when learning to read and to write. Poulson's modifications of the TORP had been piloted by Wray and Medwell (Wray, 1998) and had been found to be reliable, which was part of my motivation for using this instrument. I adapted and simplified the language of the instrument and mixed up the items.

It had been my initial intention to administer Part 3 of this questionnaire in a more participatory manner after the participatory analysis of the photographs had taken place. For

this I had planned to use a group five-pile card-sorting activity (the questionnaire statements are written on cards, which the group sorts into five piles, similar to a Likert scale, to indicate the extent to which they agree with or disagree with each statement). Such a participatory exercise would have provided opportunity for teachers to discuss their responses together while negotiating how to place the cards, and would have yielded useful data. However, I changed my strategy because while the ranking and grouping exercises were being conducted, I sensed that participants were resistant to participatory explorations and techniques (see below, and section 5.3.4). Therefore the questionnaire was in the end administered individually in print form. The purpose of the questionnaire was explained to each teacher and copies were distributed. I asked teachers to complete the questionnaires in their own time and to return them to me after a week, which two teachers did promptly and the third needed some chivvying to complete. Teachers had the option of filling the questionnaires in anonymously but none did so. The findings from this questionnaire were discussed with teachers in the interviews referred to above.

4.5.4 Observations of reading lessons

Data gathered through the participatory transect walk was triangulated with data from unstructured non-participant classroom observation of the three Grade 1 teachers teaching Literacy and with data from the questionnaire.

Observation is one of the key techniques of social research. The degree of the observer's participation in the setting and the extent to which observation is structured are important distinctions between types of observation (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 221). In non-participant observation, the observer/researcher aims to remain unnoticed by those being observed because people may change their behaviour if they are aware they are being studied. Unstructured observation was the main form of observation in this study, which resulted in it being flexible, with little standardisation, operating in a natural setting, informal and relatively unobtrusive. Cohen et al (2007, p. 228) define four options for the timing of observations: continuous observation, time-point observation, time interval observation and event observation (which was used in this case). Observation gathers a great deal of first-hand information and can be particularly effective in gathering data when respondents are either unwilling or unable to give information (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 234). In this case, the use of multiple methods of data collection enabled triangulation of data.

The classroom observations occurred on five occasions in each classroom in the second half of 2006, without the teachers having done special preparation for my visit. I took field notes and audio recordings during all the observations. Observation 1, conducted right at the start of the research process and lasting for a full day for each teacher, was open-ended and undirected, serving to orient me to the context and to suggest themes for further exploration. It allowed the children and teachers to become accustomed to my presence in their classrooms. Observation 2, conducted a week later for half a day served similar purposes, though my attention focused more specifically on resources in the classroom, leading into the transect walk and the photograph categorization activities discussed below. Observations 3, 4 and 5 tracked teacher and student activity over 2 ½ - 3 hours of lessons on each occasion in each of the three classrooms and took place over a three-month period. These observations were intended to document teaching practices such as grouping of learners, use of materials, and methodology and content. The observations were followed by teacher interviews to explore what they did in each lesson and why they did it.

Prior to conducting the research I prepared two checklists to help me record what I observed in the classroom in Observations 3, 4 and 5. One checklist was designed for observations about the classroom environment and the kinds of activities which happened in the classroom (see Appendix 5). A second checklist was designed to note all examples of metalanguage about reading. This checklist was adapted from Wray et al. (2002) and is included in Table 5 in Chapter 5 when the findings of this research are discussed. I discovered, however, that although the first checklist, for classroom activity, was a valuable reminder of what to look for in the classroom observation, it was too cumbersome to work with in the classroom context when so much was going on. It might have been usable had more than one researcher been present in the classroom. I therefore abandoned it after attempting to use it in one classroom only. The second prepared checklist, about the use of metalinguistic terminology, was used in Observations 4 and 5.

At some points in Observations 3, 4 and especially 5, my role changed from non-participant to participant observer as some of the teachers asked me to play a role in checking children's work. This was an indication of the rapport built up in the classrooms and also resulted in gathering important information.

Observations were aided by tape-recordings, which were later transcribed and annotated; by observer notes; and by a checklist of metalanguage use in the classroom. Speech acts, body movements, postures and time were all recorded to produce the thick description.

4.5.5 Teacher interviews following classroom observations

Although interviews can be classified according to various criteria, they are most commonly categorised by degree of structure. Cohen et al. delineate structured interviews, unstructured interviews, non-directive interviews and focused interviews. (2007, p.355). Merriam (2009, p. 89) considers highly structured, semi-structured and non-structured interview. In this case I was not aiming to compare data gathered across the classrooms, so highly structured, standardised and quantitative interview methods were not appropriate. While data analysis of structured interviews is easier, they are relatively inflexible and may limit the kinds of responses a participant makes. Rather, I used semi-structured, more open ended interview methods in order to obtain personalised, unique and nuanced information. In the semi-structured interviews, questions were prepared in advance, but used as a guide only, as I decided during the interview what precise words to use and in what order.

Three semi-structured interviews with each teacher were conducted, one after each of Observations 3, 4 and 5. Interviews were relatively informal, though guidelines for the interviews were drawn up (interview schedules are included in Appendix 6). Interviews lasted approximately 1½ hours each. In each interview, teachers were asked to analyse and justify their teaching practice in the observed lesson. In addition, in Interview 1 we discussed the teacher's responses to the questionnaire regarding their own reading habits, how they learned to read and their philosophy of teaching reading. This information was used to triangulate data gathered from the questionnaire. Interview 2 explored, in addition, how teachers planned their lessons. Interview 3 also explored teachers' approaches to assessment.

4.5.6 Group interview and discussion on teacher training

Watts and Ebbutt (1987) list advantages and disadvantages of collecting data through group interviews. The chief advantage, which is the reason I employed this method, is the potential they create for discussion and therefore the development of a broader range of responses. In addition they are time-saving compared to individual interviews and therefore less

demanding of research participants. Potential pitfalls include one participant dominating the discussion, reticence to express views in front of others (which would inhibit the discussion of personal matters), and “group-think” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 373).

The need for a group discussion was suggested by the findings of part of the questionnaire, which revealed that two of the three teachers had undertaken studies in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). A group interview was set up with these teachers to further explore the impact of teacher training, including ABET training on teaching literacy in the Foundation Phase. An open-ended interview schedule (see Appendix 7) was developed for this discussion.

4.5.7 Stakeholder perspectives

This research consciously focused on teacher action when teaching reading, and stakeholder perspectives were not a major part of the research. However, in order to contextualise the work done by these teachers, interviews were conducted with the School Principal and the Head of Department for Foundation Phase (see Appendix 8), focusing on school context, curriculum and language policy. Data was collected from the principal about the school’s history, Language in Education policy, curriculum/policy relating to the teaching of reading, the availability of teaching/learning materials (including financial status of the school and financial allocations for reading materials).

It was not the intention of this research to assess children’s learning in their classrooms: rather I wanted to focus on the pedagogy. However, I wanted to access the perspective of the learners in the classrooms about how they learned to read. I therefore requested the teachers to ask children to draw their class learning how to read. The instruction teachers were asked to give to learners for this activity was: “Draw a picture of a reading lesson in your class”. Only two out of the three teachers asked their classes to do this activity. These drawings provided data about learner’s perceptions of their literacy classes.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS AND REPORTING

Since a range of data types were collected in this study, a variety of techniques and tools were used in its analysis. Data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and occurred largely inductively but sometimes also deductively. Data analysis began early in the data collection and proceeded throughout the research period. Emergent findings were fed continually into the data gathering process. The analysis of data is discussed below in relation to the phases of research and the sources of data.

4.6.1 Qualitative analysis of texts in the classrooms

In keeping with the participatory nature of data collection about texts in the classroom, the participating teachers were themselves involved in the categorization of the photographs of texts in their own classrooms. These analytical activities were chosen with the intention of involving the teachers in thinking critically about their classroom practice. The hands-on sorting activities gave the teachers the power to arrange and rearrange the photographs of the artefacts in their classrooms, if necessary without explanation and verbal analysis. I expected this participatory activity to triangulate data from questionnaires and interviews.

The methodologies employed for this participatory analysis involved grouping or ranking photographs of texts taken during the transect walk. Each participating teacher separately analysed the photographs from her own classroom (duplicates and unclear photographs were removed from the set), approximately a week after the transect walk. This happened in three ways. First, undirected or open grouping of photographs; second, importance ranking; and finally, time-line ranking. The purpose of ranking exercises is to reveal priorities and preferences (Mukherjee, 1993, p. 57). In the open grouping activity participating teachers were asked to group the photographs in any way they wished. Teachers explained their grouping rationale. Once this had been done, they were given the opportunity to repeat the exercise in any other way they wished. In the importance ranking exercise, teachers were asked to choose the most important photographs in terms of teaching reading in Grade 1, and to rank these in order of importance. In the time ranking exercise, teachers were asked to arrange the photographs on a rough time line indicating at which stages of the year different

texts were most useful in teaching reading. A schedule of the process which I used in facilitating these participatory analysis activities is included in Appendix 9.

The participating teachers had varied responses to these participatory exercises. One teacher was particularly unenthusiastic and reticent to be involved in these activities. This situation is analysed in Section 5.3.4 in the next chapter.

In conducting my analysis, I was aware of a project at the University of Texas (Austin) in the USA which had developed an inventory of text types in classrooms, called the TEX-IN3 inventory (Hoffman et al. 2004; Sailors, 2002). Drawing on a social practice view of literacy (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000), this is a three-fold observation system involving a text inventory, a “text-in-use” observation and a series of teacher and student interviews. While I developed my own categorisation of the texts in this study, comparison with the TEX-IN3 categories was instructive, at least in highlighting some texts which were missing in this case. Therefore I refer to the TEX-IN3 categories at various points in my analysis, particularly in Table 4.

I did, however, borrow two rubrics of analysis from the TEX-IN3 project as an additional means of overall assessment of the data I had collected. I reasoned that the rubrics would be useful as a way of understanding the large amount of data collected from teachers through teacher interviews and the transect walk in this study. One rubric (see Appendix 11) was used to provide a holistic assessment of the texts used in the classroom and the other (see Appendix 12) was used to assess the teacher’s critical understanding of the texts in the classroom.

A rubric is an instrument for organising and interpreting data gathered through observation. Rubrics set out clearly what would be considered excellent performance in a given field, as well as what one would expect to see in any number of less than excellent performances. Rubrics are often given to learners before assessment tasks are conducted, thus making transparent the assessment process and serving as a powerful motivator. However, I chose to use the rubrics simply as an analytical tool and did not share the rubrics with the teachers at any stage. However, in concluding the research process towards the end of 2007, I did discuss with teachers how texts could optimally be used in literacy teaching, describing the “excellent” level of these rubrics and discussing ways in they might use texts differently in

their literacy lessons. I was aware, as discussed further in Chapter 5, of the fact that these rubrics were designed in the context of American schools, where there are quite different expectations of teachers and different norms in terms of teaching and learning materials. In using the rubrics I assessed which criteria had been met on the basis of my data collection in order to arrive at an overall score. This judgement was necessarily subjective, and could have been more valid had co-researchers been present to provide parallel judgements.

4.6.2 Quantitative analysis of texts in the classroom

In addition to the participatory analysis of texts in the classroom, I analysed photographs of texts quantitatively according to categories derived from the theoretical orientations towards reading reported in Chapter 2. As already indicated, an inventory of classroom texts devised in the USA called the TEX-1N3 inventory (Hoffman et al., 2004; Sailors et al., 2002) provided some useful comparisons with my analysis. The categories of text in the TEX-1N3 inventory are included in Appendix 10, and are cross-referenced with my own analysis in Table 4 in the next chapter.

For the purposes of my analysis, each photograph was allocated a category and a tally made of numbers of items in each category across the three classrooms. Simple statistical analysis enabled the comparison and graphic representation of types of text. Although the spirit in which this study was conducted emphasised the commitment to reveal and report what is rather than what is not, this quantitative analysis of texts did indicate the kinds of texts which were not present in the classrooms. This created some challenges in terms of reporting in the spirit of the study.

4.6.3 Qualitative analysis of data from classroom observation, interviews and group discussion

A great deal of research material was generated through the observations and interviews. Although most of this was audiotaped, I did not complete detailed literal transcriptions of all of these tapes. Wanting to avoid what Walford refers to as “the fetish of transcription” (Walford, 2001, p. 92, cited in Cohen et al., p. 462), I engaged in data reduction and selection which gathered data “with a wide-angle lens” and “funnelled” this through a process of

sifting, sorting, reviewing and reflecting (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 462). I listened to the audio-tapes of classroom observations and teacher interviews a number of times before beginning transcription, referring at the same time to my field notes. In the process, I started to identify patterns, themes, underlying meanings and concerns, and was able to choose segments of the tapes for close attention, translation of all isiZulu words and detailed transcription. I was concerned not to select data for transcription which supported some preconceived idea, but selected segments which fitted with the emerging “meaning fields” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 93). Out of concern not to miss important details, I returned to the original tapes a few times during the data analysis process, most recently while writing this dissertation.

The transcript segments from the taped interviews and classroom observations were analysed by means of content analysis. Cohen et al. say that content analysis “takes texts and analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form through the use of both pre-existing categories and emergent themes in order to generate or test a theory” (2007, p. 476). Other possible data analysis methods would have been discourse analysis (which is similar to content analysis in that it looks for themes by categorising and coding data, but examines specifically how language is used by participants to make sense of their reality), grounded theory (an extension of content analysis which “theorises reality according to a set of empirically organised categories” (Henning, 2004, p. 115), consciously looking for relationships and themes) or narrative analysis.

My analysis of data involved reading of data and judgement through a process of constant comparison (comparing newly acquired data with existing data), and analytical induction and enumeration (counting the frequencies of categories) to identify emerging themes. I chose to do this manually, coding and sorting data, rather than using electronic means. I felt that this gave me a greater sense of connection to the data and to the emerging themes and categories. Data analysis not using technology is very useful for small bodies of data, as long as rigorous coding is practiced. In the initial coding process I marked the data to describe:

- Teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading;
- Teachers’ ways of thinking about learners;
- Activities undertaken in the classroom;
- Relationships and social structure;
- How literacy develops;
- Texts used to teach literacy.

Subsequently, I re-categorised the items coded for texts used to teach literacy into sub-categories indicating individual word work and work with extended text. The items coded for teacher's beliefs about teaching reading were re-categorised into top-down, bottom-up and balanced groups (see Chapter 2). In the process of going through data more than once I was able to check the consistency of this coding. I next constructed statements which described what these teachers did when teaching literacy (carefully avoiding stating what they did not do), and data from different sources were categorised in terms of these statements. Examples of these statements are:

- The three Grade 1 teachers in the school follow common lesson plans each day.
- Teachers focus on teaching word recognition out of the context of extended text.

These and other statements are summarised in Chapter 5 and further discussed in Chapter 6.

4.6.4 Quantitative analysis of data generated from classroom observation

During classroom observation, a checklist of metalanguage use was employed. During lesson observations I noted all instances of oral or written use of language about language on this checklist. Very few examples of use of metalanguage were recorded, and quantitative analysis was simple and straightforward and very easily summarised in words.

4.6.5 Analysis of questionnaire

Teacher responses to the questionnaire were collated. Average scores were calculated more to give a clearer indication of trends than to prove a statistical point, since with such a small sample of teachers, statistical analysis could not yield useful results, and since the case in this study was in any event not the individual teachers but the three Grade 1 classrooms. The intention of the teacher questionnaire was to enable the correlation between teacher beliefs and teaching practice to ascertain the relationship between beliefs and practice. Once again, statistical correlation analysis was not employed due to the size of the sample. At the level of individual teachers it was easily possible to analyse the link between their practice and beliefs without engaging in statistical calculation. Although individual teachers were not intended to be the unit of analysis in this study, in presentation of the results of the questionnaire the responses given by individual teachers were reported in such a way that it would be possible

to build up a picture of each individual teacher's perspectives in relation to the beliefs and practices parts of the questionnaire.

4.6.6 Analysis of children's drawings

Children's drawings were scrutinised carefully, using content analysis. Bell points out that content analysis of visual images "is quite a technical procedure... and is seldom able to support statements about the significance, effect or interpreted meaning of a domain of representation" (2001, p.13). Such content analysis is most useful to test comparative hypotheses by making quantitative generalisations of categories. Content analysis of images can show what is given priority (*ibid*, p.26). As such, it is most useful if used as one of a number of other methods of data collection and analysis. This type of analysis, as opposed to psychoanalytic analysis, does not analyse the individual. I am not qualified to analyse children psychoanalytically, and therefore chose to tally incidences of themes in the drawings. The themes identified were categorised in terms of texts, attitudes/feelings and teacher and child activities (see Table 6 for more details).

4.7 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This project has indeed been an inductive process. The final product has been a journey of a number of years, and has seen the sharpening and focusing of a number of aspects of the original research proposal, both through formal submissions to the University and through the process of writing the dissertation. As the research progressed, my conception of the literature which should be included in the final dissertation and how it should be organised also evolved and gained focus. A similar process of evolution was experienced in relation to the research methodologies applied, with the inclusion of quantitative elements and the visual aspect. As an inductive inquiry, prepared interview and focus-group schedules were not adhered to in a strict fashion. Rather, conversations with participating teachers developed on the basis of observations, enabling exploration of unforeseen observations. The title of the dissertation was also changed in the course of the research. Thus the final product, save for the research questions, does not bear much relationship to the original research proposal. This is to be expected from this kind of research. The proposal can be seen as simply part of a

process of defining gaps in research and research questions, which was expanded on and refined throughout the research process. I see this process of evolution of the dissertation as strength rather than a limitation.

I have already detailed my ongoing involvement with the school in this study, and indicated how I reasoned that my research would be enhanced by the choice of a familiar case. The Hawthorne effect (in other words the tendency for research subjects to behave atypically as a result of their awareness that they are being observed or studied) was reduced by my ongoing association with the school. However, this familiarity caused me to struggle in a unique way with being direct about negative findings in the research. I wanted to be respectful of the participants in this research, who had so openly shared with me their activities and thoughts. This is partly what pushed me to present this study as a case study, in which the richness of what was happening in the reading lessons and the participants' own understanding was reflected. While the participatory research produced very rich data, some problems were experienced getting evenly enthusiastic participation from all three teachers involved. The participatory research was not used as effectively as it could have been. The teachers were all keen to talk about what they do, but found analysing and working with their data a challenge. I have learned that a good deal more preparation and groundwork is necessary for this kind of research, but remain convinced that the methodology can yield valuable results.

A number of years have passed between the gathering of data for this research and the completion of this dissertation. This is a limitation. Although an initial draft was produced within a year of data collection, refining this dissertation after some time necessarily means that some detail may have been lost. The existence of audio-tapes and field-notes to some extent mitigates against this. The time lapse also imposed a challenge to reflect only what existed at the time of the research, for example, not to use more current curriculum guidelines and documentation in analysing this data. Nevertheless, as I have already explained, I have opted to refer to the curriculum statement by its current name rather than the interim name by which it was known at the time of the data collection.

A further implication of this time lapse is that the situation at this school is no longer as reported in this dissertation. For example, in the 2010 school year, the medium of instruction at the school reverted to isiZulu. A number of factors contributed to this change, including, I hope, the impact of discussions related to this study. Nevertheless a characteristic of

mainstream schools in South Africa remains that the medium of instruction is different to the home language of pupils and teachers.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge two limitations to the research design which became apparent in the process of pulling this research together. While it was not my intention to assess the children's learning in this case study, this was, in retrospect, a weakness of the study. Some measures of literacy outcomes would have helped to bring this study into sharper perspective, and would have provided a quantitative indication of the impact of these specific classroom practices on development. This would also have extended and strengthened the "mixed method" nature of the study. In addition, on reflection, the research would have been improved by further modifying the TORP instrument to reflect more recent debates and theory of reading instruction. As I have already pointed out, the instrument does not include the balanced or integrated approach to reading instruction.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the findings resulting from the process of research described in Chapter 4 are presented and discussed. The chapter is organised around the key research questions, namely:

1. How do the Grade 1 teachers in this case teach reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in this practice?
2. What are the stated beliefs of teachers in this case regarding the teaching of reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in their beliefs?
3. How do teachers' beliefs about teaching reading relate to their observed and reported practice?
4. What do the texts displayed in classrooms reveal about the teaching of reading in those classrooms?
5. Can the texts displayed in a classroom be used as an effective way of revealing how teachers teach literacy?
6. What does this case study illuminate for consideration in relation to initial and continuing teacher professional development of early reading teachers?

The following is a brief explanation of symbols used in this chapter:

- Photographs are labelled with a caption and number. Photographs are numbered in ascending order as they appear in the text. It should be noted that some of the photographs included in this chapter have been cropped and digitally enhanced to improve their clarity.
- The three teachers are referred to in the references as A, G and N. The School Principal is referred to as E.
- In records of dialogue, "R" stands for researcher (myself) and "C" stands for child, while "CC" stands for children.
- As indicated already, letters written between slashes (e.g. /g/) indicate the sound of the letter, whereas the name of a letter is represented by a capital letter (e.g. G).

5.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The broader context in which this study was conducted is described in Chapter 3. This context has remained broadly the same up to the time of writing this dissertation, though a process of curriculum revision is underway. This section of the dissertation briefly sets out the particular context of the study, beginning with a description of the area in which the study was conducted, then describing the school, providing an overview of the three classrooms studied and finally providing brief biographical sketches of the teachers whose practice is reported later in the chapter.

5.2.1 The area

This study was conducted in a junior primary school in a peri-urban residential township of a large town in KwaZulu-Natal. This township has high levels of poverty and unemployment, and like similar communities, a high incidence of HIV/AIDS. It is difficult to determine clearly the size of the population of the township. In 2000, two municipal councillors from the area estimated the population at 30 000 (Boqo, 2001, p. 6), which is possibly a more likely figure than the report of the 1996 census which put it at 7 807 (Boqo, 2001, p. 6). Many people live in informal housing and in backyard rented accommodation in overcrowded conditions. A number of informal settlements border the township, with residents attending school in the township. A substantial proportion of the population derive their main income from pensions or other grants, informal family financial support, letting rooms or sheds constructed in backyards, or crime (Personal Communication, Principal E, April 2007).

During the apartheid period, the township in which this study was conducted was relatively well-off (Wittenberg, 2003). Compared to other townships, it was closer to job opportunities, it had better services as a result of the administering authority under which it fell, and, importantly for this study, education was provided by the Department of Education and Training (DET), which meant better access to funding than education provided by the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture. The township has a vibrant political history, and was an important locus for resistance against the apartheid government. A number of provincial and national politicians come from the area.

5.2.2 The school

Mthembu Junior Primary School (a pseudonym) is one of three schools serving the children from the township and the surrounding informal settlements. The three schools, this junior primary school (teaching Grades R-4), a senior primary school (Grades 5-7) and a high school (Grades 8-12) are positioned in a row, bounded by the local soccer stadium on one side and residential buildings on the other sides. As indicated above, all three of these schools formerly fell under the administration of the national Department of Education and Training.

As already indicated, the school is typical of mainstream or numeric norm schools in South Africa in terms of the socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds of learners and teachers and the challenges it faces.

Established in 1948, Mthembu has 21 classrooms (some of which were used as storerooms in 2007), and in 2006 had 230 pupils and a staff of 15, including the principal, who has worked at the school for nearly 40 years. The principal retired in June 2010. The school management team consisted of the principal, the Head of Department (Foundation Phase), who was a Grade 2 teacher, and one of the three teachers who was part of this study, Ms A. The school has an administrative secretary who was on extended sick leave in 2006, requiring functions to be carried out by other staff members. School fees in 2006 were R140 a year. The school operates a feeding scheme for learners – a mid-morning meal is cooked outside on a fire made of old pallets, and distributed to children in their classrooms in buckets.

Physically, the school looks different from its neighbours. There are flowers planted in beds at the gate and learners keep a small vegetable garden. The grass is neatly maintained, there is far less dust in the yard than in the other schools and learners can be seen picking up rubbish and cleaning gutters early every Friday morning. During school hours the gate is kept closed and usually locked. This sense of pride in the environment is echoed in the appearance of the learners, who, though many are from very poor backgrounds, are largely neatly dressed in the school's uniform.

Up until the beginning of 2006, Mthembu JPS was an isiZulu-medium school. However, parents, through the School Governing Body, placed pressure on the school to teach through the medium of English, which they argued was the language of opportunity for their children. The school agreed to do this in the face of dwindling numbers as local parents attempted to

get their children accepted into English-medium schools in town. The move was not entirely popular with the teachers, but they felt that they “had no option” but to comply if they were to keep the school open and retain their jobs there (Personal communication with Principal E, April 2006). In January 2010 the school reverted to teaching through the medium of isiZulu, to the unanimous approval of staff, who argue that they can “see the difference” in pupil performance as a result of this decision.

According to the principal, the school is classified by the National Department of Education as a Quintile 4 school. Quintiles are a factor used for pro-poor targeting of per-learner state funding to schools, determined by the socioeconomic status of the community around the school. Scores are based on national census data for the school catchment area, taking into account income, unemployment rate and literacy rate (Kanjee, 2009). Quintile 1 schools are the poorest and Quintile 5 schools the least poor. According to research by Kanjee, the quintile system effectively identifies schools in the highest and lowest categories, but schools in the middle are “often incorrectly identified” (Kanjee, 2009). In 2006, the school operated on a budget of approximately R 56 479.20 for non teaching expenses (electricity, water, telephone and photocopying), with an additional R84 718.80 allocated for Learning and Teaching Support Materials (i.e. stationery, text books and furniture). In 2006 the actual textbook budget was R40 000 for the whole school (Interview with Principal E, August 2007). This amounts to expenditure by the state of R613.90 per student per year.

Many of the teachers at Mthembu live in the area or have family members in the area, and some attended the same school in their youth. Teachers received their initial teacher training in a variety of institutions under various apartheid- and post-apartheid era authorities. There appears to be an ethos of life-long learning among the teachers: in 2006, three teachers celebrated completing further degrees or diplomas. Grant (2007, p. 12) remarks that the leadership in the school is “fluid and emergent... with real collaboration where teachers were working effectively, supporting each other and working collegially.” The school principal has much to do with encouraging this.

One Grade R class (Reception year) was established at the school in 2006. This catered for 75 children. Approximately 50% of learners in Grade 1 at the school in 2006 had attended a Grade R class either at Mthembu or elsewhere. The Grade R teacher is not qualified as a teacher, but has done a short course in Early Childhood Development run by a non-

governmental organisation in the area. Grade R pupils pay a once-off fee of R350 per year for their tuition and the school receives no further allocation of funds for these pupils.

There are three classes for each of Grades 1 – 4 at the school, with roughly the same number of children in each Grade. In 2006 the average class size was 38 children per class. The classes are not “streamed” according to ability. In Grades 3 and 4 the teachers divide up their work so that one teacher teaches Numeracy to all three classes in the Grade, while another teacher teaches English Literacy, and another teaches isiZulu and so on. In 2006 this did not occur in Grades 1 and 2. The teachers argue that this reduces their preparation load and ensures cross-class consistency. The movement of teachers between classes is informally regulated: the school bell rings only for break times.

Mthembu J.P. has 8 computers, which are housed in the staffroom. All pupils who have paid the required extra fee of R150 per year receive one ICT lesson a week from a dedicated ICT teacher paid for by these contributions.

The school has a library, housed in a large, sunny room. A collection of approximately 1500 books is housed here, as are various teaching resources including cupboards full of text books in isiZulu which are no longer used because of the school’s language policy. During 2006, a donation of R15 000 worth of books was received for the library from Rotary Pietermaritzburg. The books have been properly accessioned and classified, with the help of students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education’s Education Library and Information Services, but are arranged in a rather haphazard fashion on shelves which are prone to tip over. The room is kept locked, and although all classes have an allocated period during each week to visit the library, this does not happen regularly. Learners are not allowed to take books out of the library, but teachers may do so.

5.2.3 The classrooms

At Mthembu Junior Primary School, the three Grade 1 classrooms are located in a row along a veranda directly behind the administration block. The rooms are all similar, with a blackboard covering almost the entire wall closest to the door, while the opposite wall is covered with pinboards in varying states of repair. One of the remaining walls has large windows from end to end, while opposite, on the same wall as the door and facing onto the

veranda, the windows are small and high, with pinboards beneath them. Each room has a wooden cupboard in which the teacher keeps supplies, and child-sized wood and steel tables, seating two, with small chairs for the children. Each teacher has a table and chair, placed in the centre-front in one room, centre-side in another and along the side wall next to the door in a third. A few additional tables are stacked along the sides of the rooms, and are used for storage of learners' exercise books and other papers. The walls of the rooms are painted a relatively shabby grey-blue colour. The floors are covered in grey Marley-tiles, and in each room there are large pieces of grey or brown carpet which are moved to the front when learners need to work "on the mat" (a common practice in junior primary schools where children sit on the floor at the teacher's feet for an intimate lesson or work with the teacher).

As the nature and quality of the print text in the rooms are part of the subject of this study, teaching aids and other materials in the rooms will be described later in this chapter.

At the time of this study, the three Grade 1 classes had 40, 38 and 39 pupils respectively. These children ranged in age between 5 and 11 years and 17% (20 pupils) were repeating the grade. There were roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in each class.

5.2.4 The teachers

The three Grade 1 teachers whose practice forms the basis of this study are referred to as Ms A., Ms G. and Ms N. The School Principal is referred to as Principal E.

Ms A. is in her 40s and has been teaching for more than 25 years, though 2006 was her first year as a Grade 1 teacher. A confident communicator in various contexts, she speaks English as a home language, but speaks isiZulu fluently. She has an easy, almost motherly relationship with students, but often raises her voice to achieve discipline. She is part of the School Management Team, and appears to be held in high esteem by her colleagues. Her initial teacher training was a 3-year Primary Teacher's Diploma from the Bechet Training College, which served the so-called coloured community during the apartheid era, where she majored in Home Economics. Later she upgraded to a Bachelor's Degree and obtained a B.Ed (Hons) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She studied a module on Adult Basic Education for this degree. Ms A. is computer literate and has ADSL computer access at

home. The school's computers were donated by her husband's corporate employer through her and her husband's efforts. She is in charge of the library at the school and frequently attends library-related training events organised by the Department of Education. Subsequently to this research, she completed an Advanced Certificate in School Librarianship. Ms A. sent her own children to ex-model C schools in town. Ms A. is the informal leader of the Grade 1 teachers, taking initiative regarding planning and materials development. At lunch times, she can be seen sitting on the veranda with the children as they eat, or doing tasks in the administration block.

Ms G., who is older than 50 and speaks isiZulu at home, has been teaching for more than 20 years, and has considerable experience in Grade 1. Initially she did a 2 year teacher qualification at Indaleni College of Education, and then upgraded to a Junior Secondary Teaching Diploma at Umlazi College of Education. She has also completed training in Technical Drawing, a 2-year management course and is currently registered for a distance B.Ed through Potchefstroom University. Ms G. appears to be a gentle but firm teacher, aloof from her students, formal but reticent in communication with colleagues. She successfully maintains order in her class without raising her voice. One of her favourite admonishments in class is "Listen a.. ? .. ttentively!" Her expectation of her students is high. At lunch times Ms G. tends to sit in her own classroom with the door closed, usually accompanied by her friend, a Grade 3 teacher.

In contrast, Ms N., an isiZulu mother tongue speaker in her 30's, started teaching in 1994 at the dawn of the new South Africa, having just completed a 3-year initial teacher training course through Mbumbulu College of Education under the previous dispensation. She has subsequently upgraded her qualifications with a Certificate in Adult Basic Education (ABET) from UNISA. Ms N. has worked at Mthembu JPS for 5 years. Previously she taught in a farm school which she regards as better equipped than Mthembu in terms of learning and teaching materials. Ms N. has an easy laugh and an enthusiastic approach to her work as a teacher. She appears relaxed yet firm with her students. At lunch time she can often be seen sitting with a group of five or so teachers who like to eat together in the sun.

It should be noted that of the three teachers only Ms N. was specifically trained as a Foundation Phase teacher.

5.3 HOW READING IS TAUGHT IN THIS CASE

The first question this research aimed to answer is, “How do the Grade 1 teachers in this case teach reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in this practice?” Data in relation to this question was gathered using the transect walk methodology described in Chapter 4, classroom observations and interviews, and the questionnaire about teacher beliefs also yielded data about what the teachers considered effective practice. In this section of the thesis, findings from the different methodologies are reported separately in order to make triangulation of findings clear. In relation to each method of data collection, findings are reported in terms of three levels of text, namely sub-word (letter and sound) level, word level and extended text level. Over and above this, findings are brought together in two ways, first in three vignettes of reading lessons at the start of the section, and then in the discussion of key findings at the end of the chapter.

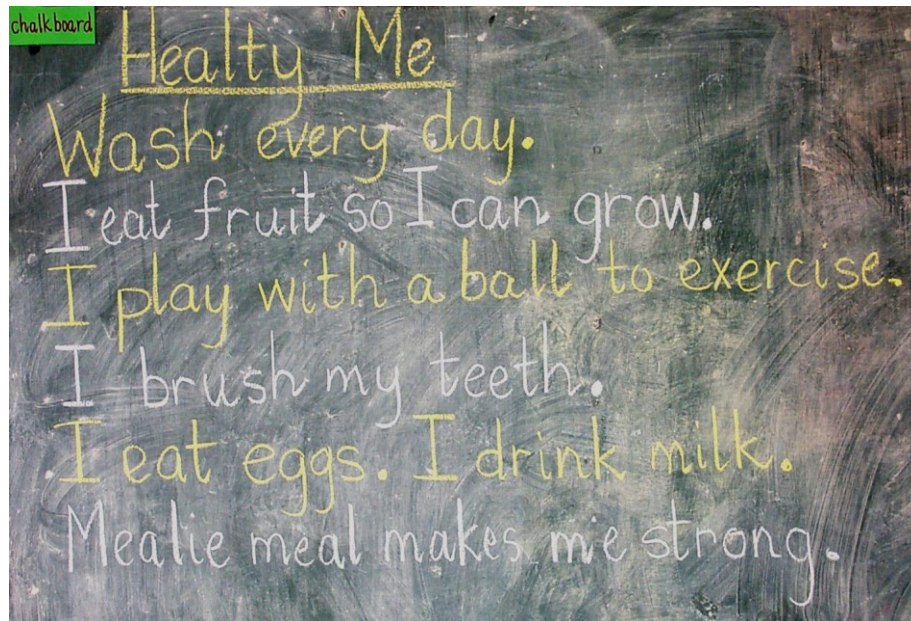
5.3.1 Three vignettes of reading lessons

In order to provide an overview of how reading is taught in this case, three vignettes of typical reading lessons, drawn from my observations and field notes, are presented next. These vignettes illustrate a typical lesson involving teaching reading in English using extended text; a typical lesson involving teaching reading in English using discrete sentences; and a typical lesson involving teaching reading in isiZulu using discrete words. In this way a context is created in which the more detailed analysis of how reading is taught can proceed. The frequency of these types of lessons during the study is discussed later.

Vignette 1: A reading lesson in English involving extended text

After their mid-morning break the 38 children line up noisily in two lines (for boys and girls) outside the classroom, pushing and shoving one another until the teacher allows them to enter the room. There is a lot of milling around and the racket of chairs scraping on the floor is ear-splitting. Standing at the front of the room, Ms A. signals the start of the lesson by saying loudly, “Sit on your bottom!” which is the first line of a verse the class already knows. The children quickly fall into reciting the whole verse loudly. Some are even shouting. Most neither sit on their bottoms nor carry out the other actions prescribed by the song. Immediately, Ms A. leads the class in recitation of “Mr Brown, Mr Brown”, “The cow says moo and how do you do” and “Chucka, chucka, chucka train” and the “ABC” By the end of

all of these recitations, most children are sitting down at the front of the room on the mat, though some boys are playing with coins in the back row. Ms A. puts a text headed “Healty Me” (sic) on the board. There are seven sentences in six lines, written alternately in yellow and white chalk (Photograph 1) Ms A. later explains that she wrote this “story” on the basis of a class discussion in isiZulu a few days earlier. Without pointing at the text, Ms A. reads the text aloud, while some children follow along quietly and others are distracted.



Photograph 1: Extended Text: Healthy Me (Ms A.)

Ms A. then asks the whole class questions about the text, “When do we eat our eggs?” She answers her own question immediately, saying, “We eat it in the morning.” Her next question is, “What is a pear, a veg or a fruit?” Many children call out answers in isiZulu and English. All children appear to be answering in single words, though in the cacophony it is hard to be totally sure of this. Now the teacher redirects attention to the text, asking “Do you remember, these are the sentences you gave me in Zulu, and I translated?” She points to the first sentence, reading it loudly in a somewhat singsong way. The class choruses the sentence after her. Then she reads the sentence again. The next sentence is tackled word by word, with the teacher reading each word first while pointing at the word, followed by the whole class chorusing the same word. When the second sentence has been read in this way, she calls on a child to read it. The child hesitates. “I eat my fruit so I can /g/-r/-o/-w/,” prompts the teacher. “Listen to the words. /g/-r/-o/-w/.” The whole class choruses “grow” three times after her. Having read all the sentences again, Ms A. sits down and takes out flash cards of words in the text. She shows the card “makes” (written in lower case letters) and says the

word five times, moving the card forward and back slightly for emphasis each time. Children increasingly join in with her. Then she moves on to “strong”, sounds the word out and repeats it five times, to the growing accompaniment of the children. Other words dealt with like this are “me”, “mielie meal”, “milk”, “drink” and “eggs”. Now the teacher stands up and reads the text loudly and in a sing-song way, sentence by sentence and pointing all the while, followed by the children. “Very good, I see some of you are remembering,” she says. A lot of children are reciting without even looking at the board. Ms A. notices a child saying, “I eat my...” Before he can complete the sentence, she pulls him up, saying “There’s no my. I eat fruit.” When they reach the end of the text, the children are sent back to their desks. This has taken about 15 minutes. The lesson changes gear as the teacher leads a 45 minute session focusing on vowel substitution in consonant-vowel-consonant words such as “pet,” “pat,” and “put.”

Vignette 2: A reading lesson in English involving discrete word work

It is the first lesson after break. There are about 50 children in the classroom due to the absence of one of the other Grade 1 teachers. Things are a bit unruly and it takes a while for Ms N. to get everyone settled down. The sound of chair legs scraping on the floor seems to go on forever. There are some interruptions from older children coming to buy pencils from Ms N.’s “shop”. Ms N. points at the A on an alphabet frieze and begins to recite the alphabet. She stops pointing after letter D. Slowly the children join in. By the time they have finished reciting, most have settled down at their tables. The lesson begins with Ms N. asking the class what the date is today. A chorus of enthusiastic voices is heard, but it is difficult to discern any particular answer. Ms N. points to the 27 on the month calendar on the wall, saying, “This was yesterday, so today is the 28th.” Next she says, “Now I want to hear some news.” A few children answer in isiZulu. There is no discussion or comment on what they say.

“Today we are going to do two Os,” announces Ms N., writing *OO* on the board. She asks for examples of words with “two Os” and a number of hands shoot up. This is not the first lesson on the topic. The children call “Tisha! Tisha!” in an attempt to attract her attention. A child gives the word “food” as an example and is called up to write *food* on the chalkboard, which she does in tiny, compact letters. “Food, foood. Does that say food? Good, let’s give her a clap,” says Ms N.

The second example that is given is “moon”. The child who is called up to write *moon* stands staring at the board. Ms N. asks him for the isiZulu translation of moon, which he gives. “We find the moon in the...?” says Ms N., eliciting a chorus of “sky.” The child looks up at the alphabet friezes on the classroom wall for help. He has remembered that the words associated with letters can be found there, but in fact the word moon does not appear on the friezes. “Are you copying?” asks Ms N. with a disapproving look. The teacher says the word again, emphasising the /m/ and the /n/. This sets off a cacophony from the rest of the class, who variously say the names of the letters M and N and their sounds loudly for about three minutes, while the teacher also says “moon” repeatedly, exaggerating and lengthening all the sounds. The child manages to write *moo*. He is stymied now. The teacher says, /n/, and instructs the class to chorus /n/. The child writes *moot*. Ms N. says, “That is a /t/, make a /n/, /n/, /nnnnnnn/.” With the rest of the class chorusing the sound /n/, the child gets it right and is released to his seating place.

The same routine is followed with the words *soon* and *food*. The next example is *door*. The teacher says, “Door. Please open the... ?” (without pointing or looking at the door in the room). “Door” choruses the class. In chorus, the class says the onset and then the rime of the word, “/d/- /or/” but there is no comment that the double vowel is pronounced differently from the previous examples. The child chosen to write the word writes an F instead of an R on the board. “Lindelani doesn’t know how to write /r/”, comments the teacher. “What is that?” she says, rubbing out the child’s attempt, and asking for another volunteer. This child starts by writing a B instead of a D. “Why do you write B?” asks the teacher. The child looks around at the alphabet frieze, but is still confused. The teacher calls up a third child to write the word. While all this is going on, some other children are looking around the room at the texts on the walls, and others are reading aloud the words on the board. The words *look*, *wool* and *foot* are added to the list on the board in the same way, still with no comment on the various pronunciations of the double-O spelling.

Ms N. rubs out the whole list of words on the board and asks the class to give her the list again, while she writes it on the board. Each word on the list is then read three times in chorus, led by the teacher, who is pointing with a long wooden ruler. Thereafter she points randomly at the words on the list, for the class to read in chorus. Then the boys read the words she points to, without her assistance, followed by the girls. Finally the teacher leads the class in reading the whole list again. Now she calls a child up to lead the class. The girl points

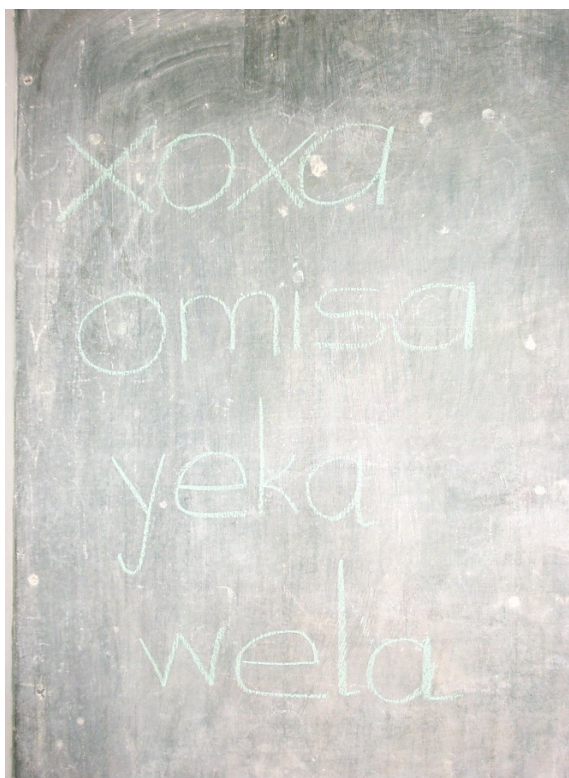
at each word twice in a rhythmical manner, while the class choruses after her. Three other children get the opportunity to lead the chant, competing fiercely through voice and gesture to be chosen for the task. “Hurry up, hurry up. Aloud!” chides Ms N. Then Ms N. instructs the class to take out their notebooks and copy down the words. “This is your spelling for Friday” she says, as the children copy the date and the list of words from the boards. A squabble breaks out between some children, and Ms N. deals with it in isiZulu.



Photograph 2: Leading the reading of words (Ms N.)

Vignette 3: A reading lesson in isiZulu involving discrete word work

It is about half an hour before break. There are 45 children present in this class today, as one of the other teachers is absent and her pupils have been split up amongst the other classes. Despite the overcrowding, the children are generally well behaved and settled where they are sitting doubled up at desks, and relatively quiet. Ms G. is an old-fashioned teacher who does not tolerate noise and disturbances, and who carries a stick to emphasise this point. The previous lesson was Numeracy, and the children have just been instructed to put their Numeracy books in a pile on a table and to sit down for an isiZulu lesson. Although the school's language policy is that the medium of instruction is English, reading is also being taught in isiZulu lessons. Ms G. has already written the following words on the board (translations are given in brackets):



X	xoxa	(to tell a story)
O	omisa	(to make dry)
Y	yeka	(to stop)
W	wela	(to cross a river)

Photograph 3: Text for isiZulu reading lesson (Ms G.)

The lesson begins with Ms G. instructing the children (in isiZulu) to read the list of words on the board, as she points to the words with a stick. “Xoxa, omisa, yeka, wela,” chants the class, the teacher’s voice leading them. Next Ms G. shows a picture of a woman drying dishes. The picture comes from a set of A4 posters illustrating verbs in isiZulu. There is space for translations of the verbs to be written, but this has not been done on this poster. “Who is this?” she asks in isiZulu, to which the children chorus “Umama (mother).” They are clearly familiar with the picture from a previous lesson. “What is she doing?” asks Ms G. in isiZulu. “Umama uyomisa (mother is drying [dishes])” the group chants together, saying the syllables rhythmically. “What letter is this?” asks Ms G. in isiZulu, pointing at the O, at which the whole class choruses the letter name “O”⁴. They do not deal with the sound of the letter. All of this has been at a fairly rapid pace, leaving no opportunity for discussion, questions, or individual engagement.

Now Ms G. says, “Omisa” slowly, exaggerating the shape of the O with her mouth and making a round shape in the air around her mouth with her finger. Then she writes the word

⁴ In IsiZulu, the names of the letters the alphabet are pronounced the same as they are in English.

on the board, saying the name of each letter as she writes it. “Let us write on air,” says the teacher in English, and, facing the children, she proceeds to write “omisa” with her hand in the air, naming the letters as she writes them. The children do the same. Some are copying her directly, although because she is facing them, they are writing the letters in reverse. This is repeated a few times.

Ms G. then puts up a picture of children crossing a river. “What are the children doing?” she asks in isiZulu, receiving the chorused reply, “Bayawela (they are crossing).” No-one replies in more than this one word. Thereafter follows a set piece: the teacher says “wela” and children spell “W, E, L, A, wela”, repeating the routine three times. The names of the letters are the same as in English. It sounds almost like drum beats. The children are (mostly) still sitting still at their desks. A similar process is followed for the remaining words on the list on the board. As the word “yeka” is spelled aloud, Ms G. notices that some children are saying, “E” instead of, “A” at the end of the word. She corrects, and asks for repeat spelling. Finally, the boys in the class are instructed to read the whole list of words together as Ms G. points to the words with her stick. Then, in English, she calls on the boys to, “Look who is not reading” while the girls read the list. Homework is then given: the task is to “find” words by replacing the vowels in the list words with other vowels. The children are not told whether these words should be written down or not.

5.3.2 Quantitative analysis of texts displayed in this case

As explained in Chapter 3, the key data collection method used to uncover what teachers do when teaching reading in Mthembu Junior Primary School involved a transect walk through each classroom, in which the teachers used the texts visible in the room to explain how they teach reading. All texts were photographed, and analysed qualitatively by teachers themselves in a series of categorisation exercises, and by myself both qualitatively and quantitatively. The mixed method analysis of the photographs provides an overview of what texts were present in the case study and a background against which data gathered through observations and interviews can be understood.

Texts in classrooms obviously change on a daily basis. However, during the course of this research, I observed a basic infrastructure of text in each classroom which did not change and

which far outnumbered texts which did change. Teachers explained that they put up their “teaching aids” at the start of the school year to make their classrooms “look attractive” (A, interview) and to “decorate the room” (G, interview). Table 4 presents an overview of the texts visible in each classroom on one day in August 2006. Items which were removed/added at some stage during the data collection period are marked (*), while items which were permanently displayed throughout the data collection period are not marked.

Table 4 is arranged broadly according to the teachers’ ranking of the importance of different types of texts, with subcategories introduced from my own analysis. These subcategories are drawn from the theories of reading presented in Chapter 2, so as to enable analysis through the lens of reading theory. For purposes of cross-reference, as discussed in Section 4.5.1, categories used in the TEX-IN3 instrument for analysis of text in classrooms are also included where appropriate for cross reference purposes.

While my analysis of the texts involved different categories from the TEX-IN3, comparison with the TEX-IN3 is instructive for three reasons. First, it shows up a range of text types which were not present in this case, such as audio recordings, levelled readers, electronic texts, serials and journals. The absence of such texts was attributed by teachers to lack of finance (A, interview), but teachers also expressed wariness of having equipment such as tape recorders and audio recordings or electronic texts in the classroom, fearing that children would break them (N, interview). In other words, the absence of particular types of text did not necessarily indicate anything about teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading and was more likely to be a pragmatic absence. This did not apply, however, to students’ journals, which teachers did not regard as appropriate for Grade 1 pupils (N, G, A, interviews).

The comparison shows up a second category of texts not found in this case, namely texts created to guide students to follow certain procedures, or “process charts.” The TEX-IN3 distinguishes between extended text process charts and limited text charts. Extended text process charts, of which none were found in this case, are multi-sentence, connected texts that guide students on the use of particular strategies for reading, writing or mathematics. Examples would be assessment rubrics, or explanations of strategies which can be used to figure out unknown words. The absence of such texts in this case signals the fact that reading is seldom taught explicitly, as will be detailed below. Limited text process charts are letter or word level texts that guide students in the use of a particular strategy. In this case study,

examples were the alphabet charts and the word-family charts. Word Walls could be described as limited text process charts depending on how words are arranged on them. In this case, words were arranged haphazardly on Word Walls, as is discussed in the next section, and are therefore not classed as process charts in this case.

A third gap illuminated by comparing my categorisation of texts with the a-priori classification system from TEX-IN3 is the absence of organisational management texts. A class timetable would be one example, or a chart showing tasks for groups of children through the course of a day or week. Such an organisational chart would indicate, for example, when certain groups of children would read aloud to the teacher. Other possible examples, also not seen in this case could relate to classroom management, such as texts saying “Put pens in this tin” or “Put rubbish in the bin.” The absence of organisational management texts signals the fact that the teaching in these rooms happened almost entirely on a whole-class basis, the fact that children did not routinely read to the teacher and that text was not used for meaningful communicative purposes in the classrooms.

In Table 4 and the discussion which follows I distinguish between commercial (bought) and local (homemade) texts. A false legacy of apartheid education is the general assumption that because they cost less and look homemade, locally produced materials are somehow inferior to commercially produced materials. However, locally made texts such as Language Experience charts are extremely valuable in the teaching of reading in that the teacher is able to use them to show the relationship between speech and text in a dynamic way linked to learners’ interests and experience. They therefore have the potential to be more responsive to context than commercial texts.

Photographs of some of the items listed in Table 4 can be found in other sections of this chapter where they are used to illustrate the discussion. In such cases, cross-references to the photographs are included in Table 4.

Table 4: Texts visible in classrooms on one day

Text type	Total incidence	Description (* refers to items added or removed during the six-month data collection period. Abbreviations marked # are defined in the table of Acronyms and Abbreviations.)			Photographs
		Ms A.’s classroom	Ms G.’s classroom	Ms N.’s classroom	
Texts focusing on letters and sounds					
Alphabet charts/friezes <i>(TEX-IN 3 : Limited text process charts)</i>	11 sets ⁵ (note: words are never in sentences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frieze with capital and l/c[#] letters only• Commercial alphabet frieze⁶ with letter, word & pic[#] (English)• Bilingual alphabet frieze with letter, English word, isiZulu translation & pic• Commercial alphabet chart (English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frieze with capital and l/c letters only• Commercial alphabet frieze with letter, word & pic (English)• Bilingual alphabet frieze with letter, English word, isiZulu translation & pic• Commercial alphabet chart(English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frieze with capital and l/c letters only• Commercial alphabet frieze with letter, word & pic (English)• Bilingual alphabet frieze with letter, English word, isiZulu translation & pic	4 6
Phonics teaching materials (clearly focusing on sound-letter correspondence) <i>(TEX-IN 3 : Limited text process charts)</i>	5 sets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Our sound tree”• Set of isiZulu diphthongs with action word, English translation and illustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word families (English cvc # words with short vowels)• Set of isiZulu diphthongs with action word, English translation and illustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set of isiZulu diphthongs with action word, English translation and illustration	7 11 31

⁵ The word “set” in this context refers to a frieze consisting of all the letters of the alphabet, or a number of flashcards used together for sightword drill, or a number of isiZulu diphthongs. The components of these sets are not counted individually but as a set.

⁶ An alphabet frieze is a set of pages arranged alongside one another in a long strip. Each page relates to one letter of the alphabet. In contrast an alphabet chart is a large poster, divided into rows and columns, with each resulting cell containing details relating to one letter.

Text type	Incidence	Ms A.'s classroom	Ms G.'s classroom	Ms N.'s classroom	Photograph
Materials for "sight word" drill (<i>TEX-IN 3 : Limited text process charts</i>)	2 sets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flash cards for sight drill (*) 			
Texts focusing on isolated words / vocabulary					
Labels ⁷ (<i>TEX-IN3: Instructional Aids</i>)	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair chalkboard "Reading" (for Reading Corner) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name labels on 5 children's desks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name labels on 3 children's desks Reading corner cupboard 	1 10 18
Lists of words displayed on walls on one day (<i>TEX-IN3: Instructional Aids</i>)	26 lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Days of the week Colours Seasons and months of the year Birthday chart with months and names Commercial opposites poster (continued) Commercial shapes poster Parts of the body Commercial picture of classroom with lists of items Words from the <i>Tortoise and Rabbit</i> story Word Wall Words on alphabet frieze (English and isiZulu) Names of numbers 1-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parts of the body List of isiZulu words on board (*) Words on alphabet frieze (English and isiZulu) Names of numbers 1-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Days of the week Colours Birthday chart with months and names Parts of the body Words from the <i>Tortoise and Rabbit</i> story Word Wall Words on alphabet frieze (English and isiZulu) Rooms in the home poster 5 unrelated isiZulu words on poster Names of numbers 1-10 	3 7 9 11 28

⁷ Labels are recorded here with the same capitalisation as used in the classroom.

Text type	Incidence	Ms A.'s classroom	Ms G.'s classroom	Ms N.'s classroom	Photograph
Written language about language (metalinguage)	4 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chart headed "sentences" Word "vowels" written on board (*) "sound" (part of heading on chart of letters) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chart headed "Alphabet" 	0	12
Games, puzzles and manipulatives featuring text <i>(TEX-IN3: Games, puzzles and manipulatives)</i> Games, puzzles and manipulatives featuring text (continued)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shape-name match game (*) Colour-name match game (*) Reading card (random words) (*) Scrambled words workcard (*) Pictures-words workcard (*) Parts of face labelling game (*) 	0	0	20 24
Reference books <i>(TEX-IN3: Reference materials)</i>	1	Locally made "dictionary" (actually an alphabet book)	0	0	16
Total number of single words displayed on classroom walls on one day (excluding repeated number words)	639	323	99	217	

Text type	Incidence	Ms A.'s classroom	Ms G.'s classroom	Ms N.'s classroom	Photograph
Extended Text					
Library books (stories & non-fiction) and other reading material (TEX-IN3: Trade Books)	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 fiction titles designated for teacher use only (in English and Afrikaans) in Reading Corner 39 fiction titles for children's use (in English and Afrikaans) in Reading Corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single copy of fiction Big Book on display Single copy of story book on classroom floor under teacher's chair (*) Pile of old newspapers on chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single copy of "The Mirror" newspaper on teacher's desk Single copy of poetry collection on teacher's desk 5 "Big Books" including 2 locally made ones 	17 18
Extended text written by teacher with or without student assistance (TEX-IN3: Student / teacher published work)	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Story of Vivi Healthy me (*) Our visitors Copies of locally made book "Boy and Girl" 	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom rules Locally made Big books titled 'Elephant' and 'Frog' "I am a boy/girl" poster Copies of locally made book "Boy and Girl" 	1 13 14 25 49
Text books (TEX-IN3: Text books)	1 set of about 40 books	0	Class set of Life-Skills text book	0	
Inspirational Texts (these are all extended text posters as well)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "A nation that reads is a nation that grows" (commercial) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Let us make our schools centres of care and support" (commercial) Four sentences from Freedom Charter, e.g. "There shall be work and security." (local) 	2 15

Text type	Incidence	Ms A.'s classroom	Ms G.'s classroom	Ms N.'s classroom	Photograph
Extended text commercial posters	5	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster: "Two little dickie birds" (8 lines) • Poster: "Geza izandla..." (6 sentences) • Poster: "Let's make maths fun" (1 sentence) • Poster: "Selected traffic signs, signals and markings for primary schools. Shapes and colours" • Commercial poster of food groups (a number of phrases, but as a whole could be seen as extended text) 	0	5
Total no. of sentences visible on 1 day	73	27	21	25	
Student-made texts					
Children's work displayed (<i>TEX-IN3: work-product displays</i>)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class set of drawings of traffic lights (only text = children's names) • Class set of coloured-in SA flags with photocopied heading (no text by child) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class set of cut out hands with child's name • Class set of coloured-in SA flags with photocopied heading (no text by child) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class set of collage pictures of faces (no text) • Class set of pictures of rabbit and tortoise (some with children's names) • Selected children's lists of words with pictures hung across room • 6 drawings headed "Women's day" • Class set of coloured-in SA flags with photocopied heading 	19 20

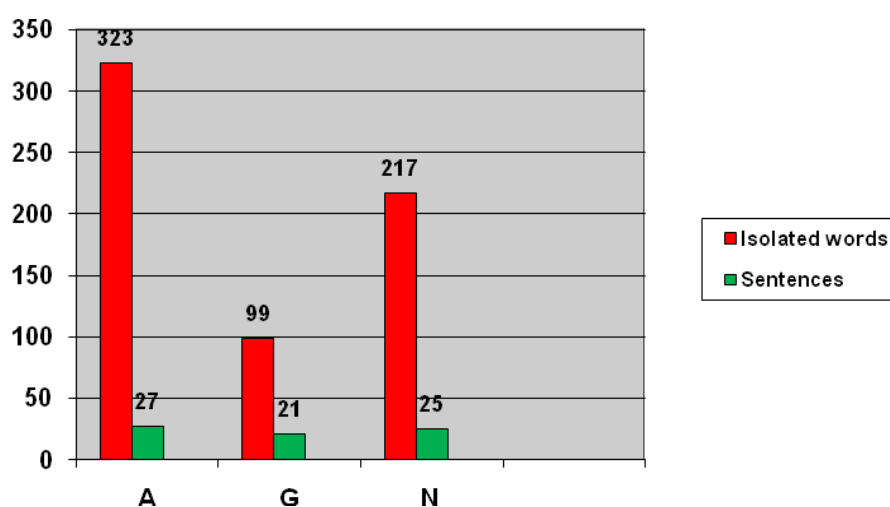
Text type	Incidence	Ms A.'s classroom	Ms G.'s classroom	Ms N.'s classroom	Photograph
Children's workbooks, worksheets (TEX-IN3: Writing on paper)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class set of notebooks for Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills Various completed and unused worksheets lying amongst other papers on a table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class set of notebooks for Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills Various completed and unused worksheets lying amongst other papers on a table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class set of notebooks for Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills Various completed and unused worksheets lying amongst other papers on a table Unused copies of Vivi worksheet – cut and reassemble sentences 	21
Portfolios of assessment (TEX-IN3: Portfolios)		Class set of Portfolios Containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "D" worksheet Getting ready for school worksheet – match sentence and pictures 	Class set of Portfolios Containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "D" worksheet Getting ready for school worksheet – match sentence and pictures 	Class set of Portfolios Containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "D" worksheet Getting ready for school worksheet – match sentence and pictures 	22
Texts used for organisation and management					
(TEX-IN3 : Organisational/ management charts)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Classroom information (names of school, teacher, principal, class) Birthday chart Class register poster with results (*) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> jJ Jail poster Commercial calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial Calendar Birthday chart 	27
Text-based teaching aids for learning areas other than Literacy					
General teaching aids		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching clock Weather chart Height chart Healthy me poster with labels of body parts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 x height charts Posters showing "Wild animals" and "Pet animals" Commercial posters advertising pears and grapes Poster: children holding different shapes (no text besides heading) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weather chart 	

Text type	Incidence	Ms A.'s classroom	Ms G.'s classroom	Ms N.'s classroom	Photograph
Numeracy /mathematics		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial 100-square (Numbers & words) 3 x 1-10 (words and pics; symbol & words; numbers & pics) Local 1-10 (numbers, words and dots in pattern) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local numbers & words 1-10 Number symbols 11-33 out of order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-10 Symbols and words 1-10 Symbols, numbers, dots in pattern 	
Categories from TEX-IN3 not observed in any of the classrooms in the case study					
<i>Computers/ electronic texts</i>			<i>Levelled books</i>		<i>Serials</i>
<i>Extended text process charts</i>			<i>Journals</i>		<i>Audio stories</i>

Two important features of the texts observed in this case stand out from this quantitative analysis. First, by far the majority of texts were in English, the language which children are learning and through which they are learning. Bilingual texts were present in the form of alphabet friezes but though they offered translations of vocabulary the children were clearly still learning, they did not support the process of learning to read, as is discussed below.

The second key feature is that the most common texts available for children to read in the classrooms in this study consisted of isolated and generally decontextualised words. Relatively few sentences and even fewer extended and coherent texts were available for them to read. This is recorded in Table 4, and graphically in Figure 14 below. In all three classrooms, on one day in August 2006, a total of 639 isolated words were displayed on the classroom walls and chalkboards, but only 73 sentences (note that not all these sentences/words were displayed at the same time because of the impermanent nature of the chalkboard). While the number of isolated words displayed differed substantially over the three classrooms, the number of sentences displayed was roughly constant across the rooms. The relatively huge number of single words found in the classrooms in this case suggests that teaching focused far more on words than on sentences or longer texts and points to a bottom-up teaching approach. Data from observations and teacher interviews corroborate this conclusion.

Figure 14: Numbers of isolated words and sentences displayed on walls of classrooms of Teachers A, G and N on one day in August 2006



5.3.3 Description and analysis of texts displayed in this case

Position and purpose of texts

Most of the texts recorded in the transect walk were displayed on noticeboards or stuck on the walls of the classrooms. All the noticeboards were positioned relatively high on the walls of the rooms. Items displayed could thus be seen from a distance if the print was clear enough, but were otherwise not easily accessible for young children to read. All the alphabet freizes were placed high up on the walls, above window height. Word Walls (see below) were situated below window height, but obscured from view by desks and children's heads. One of the classrooms had three different height charts, but none of these was correctly positioned so that children could use them to measure their height.

The positioning of many of the texts so that they were difficult for children to read or use for their intended purpose suggests that these texts were not effectively used in support of learning. Teachers regarded the purpose of the texts on the walls as being to "make the classroom attractive" (A) or to "decorate the room" (G), and although they definitely did use some of the texts in the rooms for other purposes, the dominant impression created was that the texts on the walls were more for show than for instructional use.

As was argued in Chapter 2, a classroom which supports the development of literacy in young children should ideally reflect the uses of literacy in the daily life of the classroom. Lists of children in different groups, the names and tasks of various kinds of helpers, labels for different storage areas and equipment, processes for various classroom procedures and learning skills, would be among the texts expected in such classrooms. In addition, one would expect to find texts which reflect functions of literacy in life in general, such as telephone directories, menus, shopping items and so on. Another important way of bringing real life functions into the literacy classroom is through creating of play contexts that engage children in using literacy. None of these were visible in the three classrooms studied.

Most of the text encountered by children in these classrooms was decontextualised and defunctionalised. The unstated message which children get from this kind of classroom is that reading and writing are not related to the purposes of people in real life, but are about learning new words one at a time.

Language of texts

As the quantitative analysis showed, extremely little isiZulu was observed on the walls of the classrooms despite the fact that all the students at the school speak isiZulu as their mother tongue and most are very much beginner English Language Learners. Where isiZulu text was visible it usually offered a translation of an English word. In other words, isiZulu was mostly used to facilitate English vocabulary building.



Photographs 4 (a) & (b): IsiZulu translations of English words (A, N)

Full isiZulu sentences were only seen in one classroom, in a commercially produced poster issued by the Department of Health, encouraging the washing of hands (Photograph 5). One prominent sentence on this poster is written without capitalisation or other punctuation and thus provides a poor model of a correctly punctuated sentence.

It was clear from the texts recorded through the transect walk that English was the valued, preferred, emphasised language, and that bilingualism was being fostered in a subtractive way. In Chapter 2 literature was presented which argued that children learning to read should be in a position to draw on their knowledge of the structure, vocabulary and usage of their home language while they master the process of reading, and that once they are independent readers they are easily able to transfer reading skills to a second language. This was not facilitated in this case.



Photograph 5: Only visible example of extended text in isiZulu (G)

IsiZulu was taught as a separate “subject” and allocated far less classroom time than English. As Vignette 3 illustrates, however, isiZulu lessons also focused on the formation of written letters, their sounds and the way they work together in syllables and words and reading was thus also taught in isiZulu lessons. I shall return to the use of language when I report findings from classroom observations in the next section.

The fact that the children in this case were beginning English Language Learners offers one way of interpreting the fact that they encountered so many isolated words as opposed to extended text during Grade 1. The common-sense view is that one learns a new language by a process of translation and that therefore one should focus on learning vocabulary (in other words, isolated words). However, as became clear through interviews, observations and the questionnaire in this study, this was not the prime motivating factor for the focus on words in this case – rather, the teachers believed that one needs to focus on letters, sounds and words in order to learn to read.

Letter and word level texts

Figure 14 shows the high proportion of isolated words displayed in the classrooms in this case. I classified these words into nine categories, based on their intended pedagogic usage:

1. Words grouped graphophonically, as part of alphabet friezes or alphabet charts;
2. Words with a common spelling pattern;
3. Words which form part of semantic themes;
4. Labels for objects in classroom;
5. Words which are part of stories;
6. Words used as bilingual semantic devices;
7. Words about language (metalanguage);
8. Words in games, puzzles and manipulatives;
9. Words relating to numbers.

These categories of words are discussed in turn below.

Across the three classrooms there were 11 alphabet friezes. Although some were bilingual (see below), in all these friezes the letters of the alphabet are associated with an English word whose initial sound corresponds with a common pronunciation of the associated letter, in other words the association is graphophonic, as illustrated in Photograph 6. Alphabet charts

are limited text process charts, in other words they guide learners in the use of a particular strategy, in this case the strategy of associating the beginning sound with the initial letter of a word.



Photograph 6: Words arranged graphophonically according to initial sound in alphabet frieze (N)

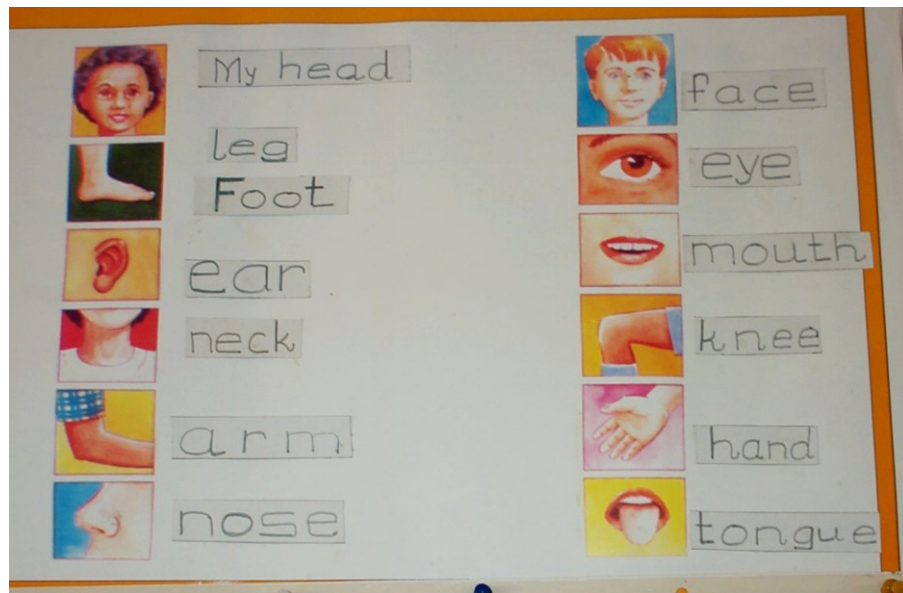
The second category of words, found in limited text process charts, have a common spelling pattern and are thus lexically (though not necessarily phonologically) linked. A sub-category of this group is “word families” with a common rime. In this research, word families were most often found on the chalkboard as part of a list (as shown in Photograph 2) or a rebus sentence and were typically not displayed permanently on the classroom walls. Only one permanent display of words with a common spelling pattern was found, namely a chart of English three letter words with common final syllables displayed permanently in Ms G.’s classroom (Photograph 7).



Photograph 7: Words grouped into “Word families” (G)

A third way in which teachers in this case study grouped words was according to theme. Meaning therefore played a role in this grouping. Although the words were semantically linked they were still presented as lists rather than as part of an extended text and are therefore considered as isolated words in this analysis. These words were typically listed together on a permanent wall chart, with appropriate illustrations. Examples were lists of parts of the face, colours, shapes or days of the week (Photographs 8 a, b & c). Table 4 shows that 26 such lists were visible in the Grade 1 classrooms at Mthembu on one day.

A fourth way of grouping words was as encountered in a story. These words were not obviously semantically or lexically linked out of the context of the story. There was only evidence of words from one story namely the fable of the tortoise and the rabbit (Photographs 9 a and b) in these classrooms over the full period of data gathering. In two of the three classrooms, teacher illustrations of the protagonists of the story were accompanied by limited lists of key words in isiZulu and English. Some of the words from this story were also recorded on the “Word Wall” illustrated in Photograph 9b, but were not placed in any logical relationship to one another or to other words on the wall, and were not linked by colour. Although not common, such groupings of words provided evidence that teachers sometimes introduced vocabulary / reading words in the context of a story.



Photographs 8 (a), (b), & (c): Semantically grouped word lists (A, G, N)



Photographs 9 (a) & (b): Words from the story “Tortoise and Rabbit” displayed on a poster and on a Word Wall. (A, N)

Teachers said that they used Word Walls to list words encountered in stories. However, the arrangement of the words on these walls was not conducive to learners using the Word Walls as a resource in the classroom. As Photograph 9b shows, words were haphazardly arranged on the wall. They were not grouped in terms of the story (for example, the words *tortoise* and *rabbit* from the story of the same name are not placed in proximity to one another) and the use of colour played no role in focusing children's attention on any features of the words. Better practice would have been to arrange words alphabetically or thematically so that learners could easily locate them when they wanted to write the words. Words could also have been grouped according to spelling patterns or function in a sentence to assist in word recognition or writing. In the two classrooms that had Word Walls, the words in these collections made a sizable contribution to the total number of words available to read in the classroom. However, I did not ever witness pupils reading or referring to the words on the Word Walls. This may have something to do with the positioning of the Word Walls as described already. Mattson and Harley (2002), writing about South African classrooms post the introduction of Outcomes Based Education, noted how many teachers "mimic" the correct form but not the substance of many "new" instructional practices. The Word Walls at Mthembu JPS are an example of this.

Labels for items or areas in the classrooms constitute the next category of isolated words. Labelling in the classrooms appeared to be haphazard and not very common. Examples were children's names on some of the desks (at the start of the year, each child's desk was reportedly labelled, but by August only a few of these name labels remained), labels on the cupboard or chair, and the designation of a "Reading Corner" (see Photograph 10).

An unusual example of a label was the "Jail poster" placed on the wall at the front of Ms G.'s classroom, just next to the teacher's desk (Photograph 11). This A4 sized page had clearly been part of an illustrated alphabet frieze, the rest of which was not displayed. Ms G. was shy about explaining the purpose of this page, laughing that "That is the jail!" It can be surmised that this was a place where students were placed for punishment purposes. The "jail" was never observed in use.



Photograph 10: Label (N)



Photograph 11: The jail (G)

A sixth way of grouping words was when teachers used lists of words as bilingual semantic devices, providing both English and isiZulu words for items illustrated. Generally, these words were totally decontextualised except for an illustration of the word. Examples were the words on the bilingual alphabet chart which illustrated the initial sound of the English words, and a series of posters illustrating verbs in isiZulu, in which the Zulu digraphs were highlighted and English translations given (see Photograph 12 a and b). From the perspective of translation, these bilingual devices assist the children to understand the meaning of words in the language they are learning. However, from the perspective of learning to read, they may create more cognitive confusion than clarity. Consider, for example, Photograph 12a below or Photograph 4a above (although not very clear, this puts the word *indlovu* and elephant together under the letter eE).



Photograph 12 (a)

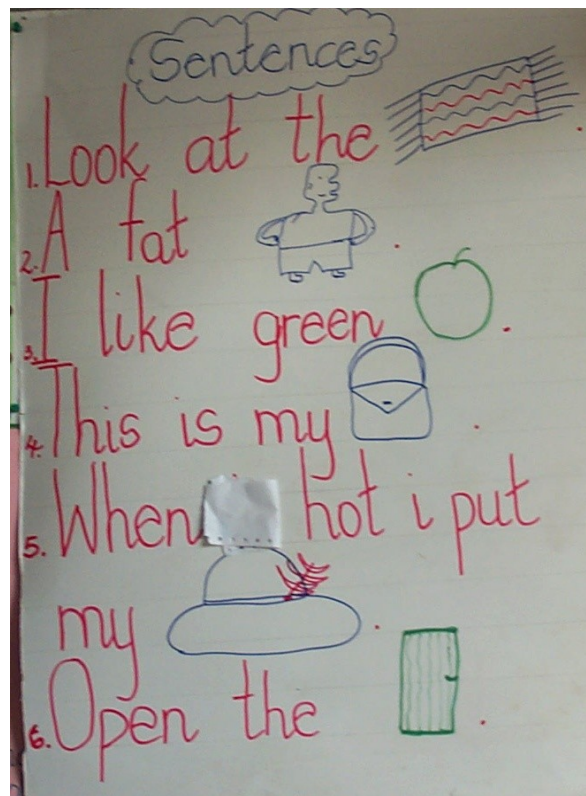


Photograph 12 (b)

Photograph 12 (a) & (b): Bilingual word charts (A, N)

As I have argued elsewhere (Verbeek, 2010), if a child is already able to read, then translations such as these could help with learning vocabulary in a new language. However, since alphabet friezes as in Photograph 4, or examples of consonant digraphs as in Photograph 12a, are intended to be used as an aid in teaching letter-sound correspondence in the process of learning to read, they cannot fully serve their intended function because pictures, sounds and letters cannot be accurately associated with the translations of words.

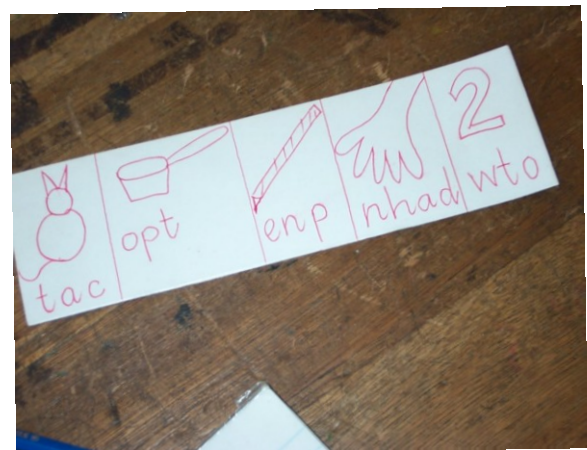
A seventh category of words was words about language (metalanguage), the importance of which is discussed in Chapter 2. Only three permanent examples of metalanguage were observed on the classroom walls, and one example on a chalkboard. These were the words “Alphabet” (the heading on a commercial alphabet chart), “Sentences” (the heading of a local chart of rebus sentences), “sound” (part of a heading for a chart showing letters of the alphabet) and “vowels” (referring to a list of letters on a chalkboard) [original capitalisation, see Photographs 13 (a) and (b)].



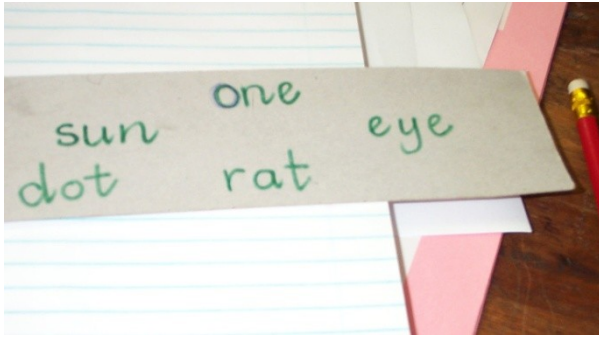
Photograph 13 (a) & (b): Metalanguage (G, A)

The eighth category of single words consisted of games, puzzles and manipulatives which are designed for student use. None of these texts were immediately obvious in this study, but when pressed to do so, Ms A. produced a number of activities from a cupboard. These were all locally produced activities which could be done alone or in competition with another child

or children. Some of these activities could be completed without exercising the skill they were intended to practice. For example, one game involved matching up colours and their names (Photograph 14a), but since the names were written on corresponding coloured paper, the activity could be completed without reading. Similarly, in the shape-name matching activity, the colour of the paper could be used to complete the activities. Another activity, to be completed individually and then checked against the answers on the reverse of the cards involved unscrambling the letters of words (Photographs 14b). In a further activity, the child was expected to write/ say the names of a list of pictures and check on the back of the card whether these had been correctly named or spelled (Photographs 15 a and b).



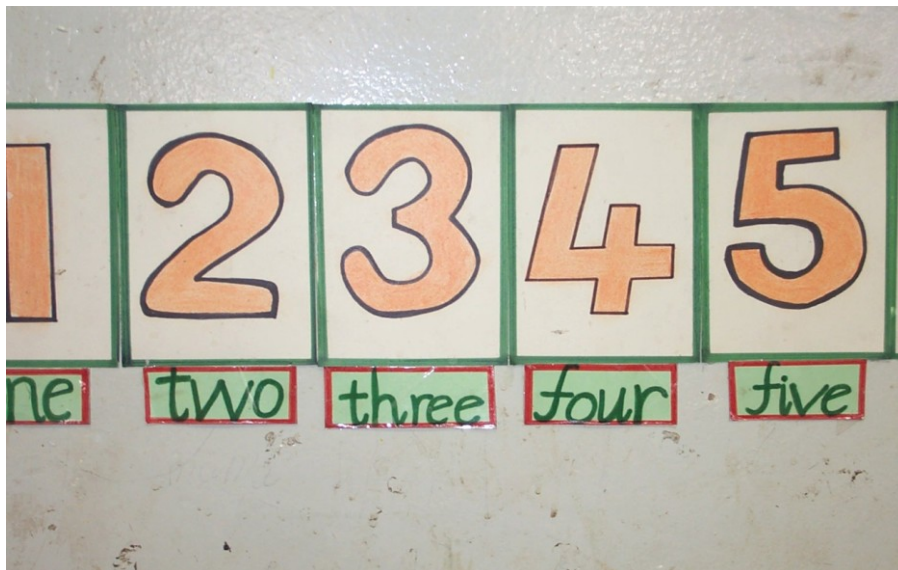
Photographs 14 (a) & (b): Literacy manipulatives and puzzles (A)



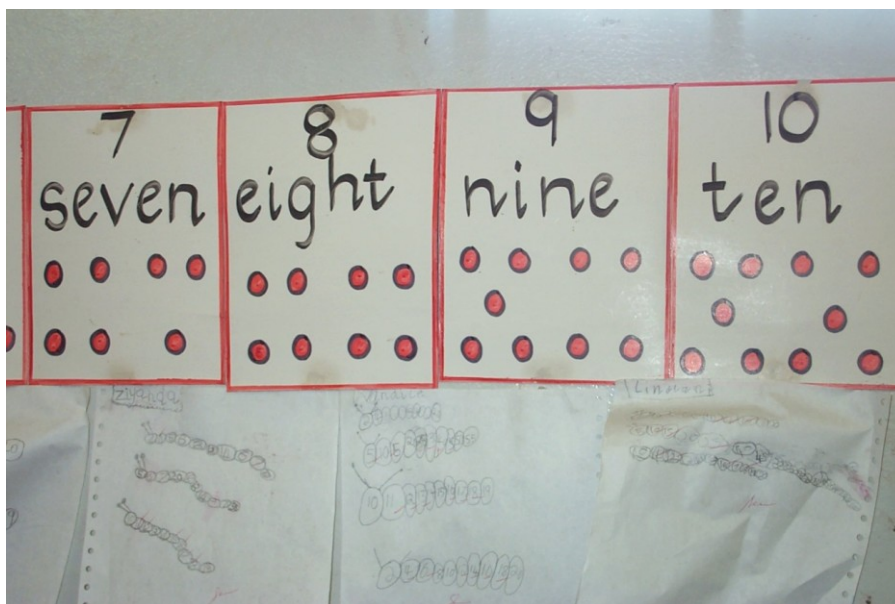
Photographs 15 (a) & (b): Front and back of reading/writing card (A)

The final category of single words identified consist of number names. Table 4 shows that a number of numeracy-related texts were displayed in all three classrooms.

Most of these consisted of some form of number symbol and name sequences, sometimes with illustrations arranged in patterns. In Ms A.'s room there was a commercially produced 1-100 square with all the number names up to 100, but this was the only text which gave the written names of numbers beyond 10 (it should be noted that the numeracy curriculum requirement is that Grade 1 learners should be able to count objects and write number symbols up to 34).



Photograph 16 (a)



Photograph 16 (b)

Photographs 16 (a) and (b): Number-related texts (N, G)

Particularly at Foundation Phase level, learning numeracy is very much about learning language and concepts and the link between the Numeracy learning area and learning to read and write is very tangible. However, as I will discuss later in Section 5.3.9, many children in Ms N.'s class drew themselves learning numbers and doing sums when they were asked to illustrate themselves learning to read. It is possible that this shows that the children and Ms N. have very broad conceptions of what literacy is, and that recognising and naming numbers is seen as “reading” the numbers. Some comments made by Ms N. in interviews support this hypothesis, as will be seen.

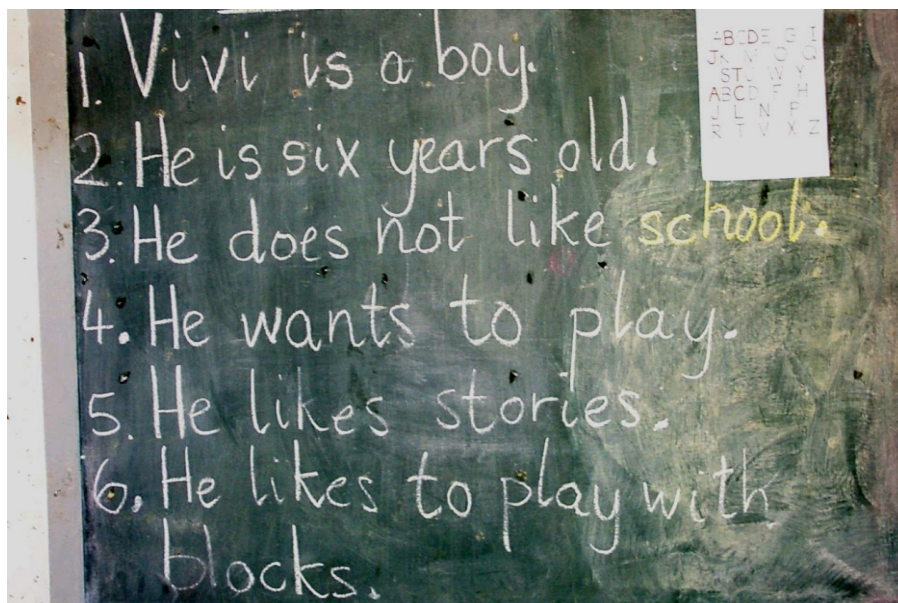
Numeracy is an area of study in which process charts could easily be created. For example, one might expect to see charts showing different ways of performing an addition calculation. But no such process charts were observed in this case study, underlining that the focus in the classrooms is not on process but on isolated vocabulary.

Extended texts

In contrast to the large number of isolated words seen in the classrooms, hardly any extended texts were visible on the classroom walls in this case. Extended text means words used in the context of sentences or paragraphs. In this section I first describe extended texts or “stories”

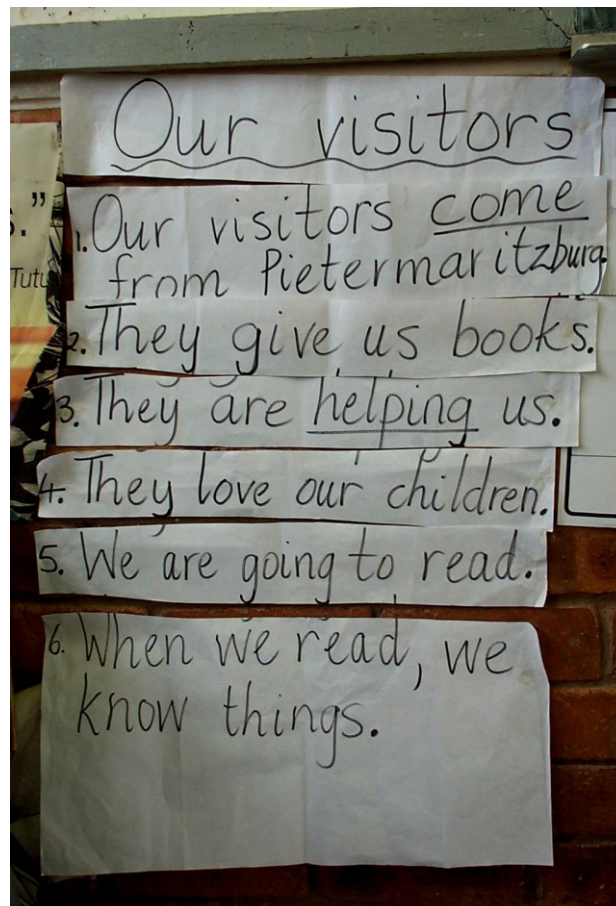
created by teachers, sometimes with their students, for instructional purposes. Secondly I describe extended texts which are not designed for instructional purposes, including motivational texts and texts for classroom management. Finally I cover books present in the classrooms, including text books and library books.

Three examples of locally produced “stories” containing more than one sentence were observed in the case study over the data collection period. One of these stories, about a boy called Vivi (Photograph 17), was found in all three classrooms.



Photograph 17: Extended text: The story of Vivi (A)

This story had been created in isiZulu in an earlier lesson by learners in one of the classes (which I did not observe) and written down in English by the teacher. It was used in all three classrooms, where it was written up on the chalkboards and also turned into a worksheet in which learners had to cut apart all the words and put the text back together again by matching word order to the full text. Each sentence in this story was numbered and began on a new line, that is, it was not written in correct paragraph form. Consequently, the language of the text was unnatural and stilted. The same was true for the other two examples of extended text found on the walls of the classrooms during this research, i.e. the “Healthy me” sentences (Photograph 1) and the story about “Our visitors” (Photograph 18). These texts approximate Language Experience Texts, but it was hard to gauge from the teacher’s explanations exactly what role the children played in the production of the texts.



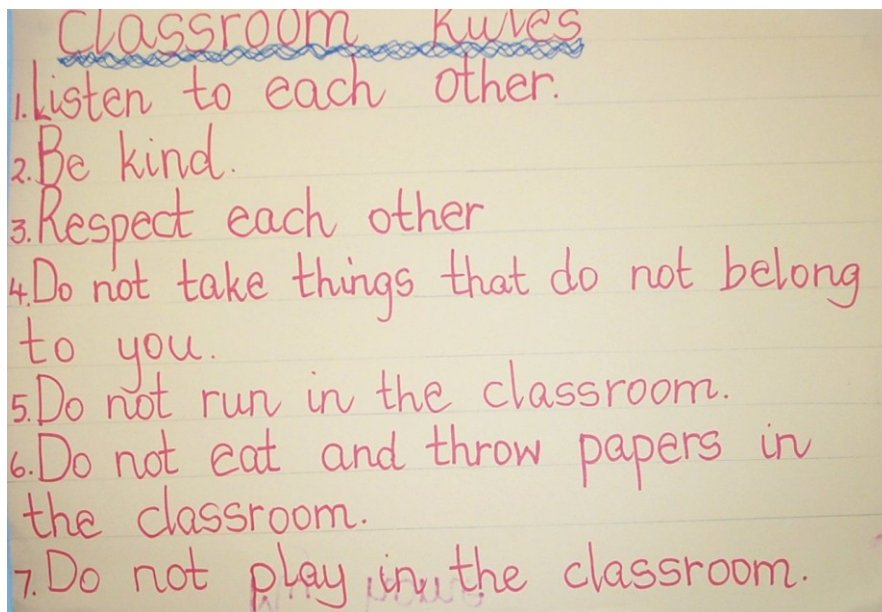
Photograph 18: Extended text - Our visitors (A)

In addition to these three stories which were clearly created for and used in reading instruction and practice, a number of other extended texts on the walls could be read by children though they were not intended as instructional texts. In one classroom a commercial poster with the nursery rhyme, “Two little dickie birds,” was displayed. This was the only instance of a rhyme/poem displayed in the case study. Table 4 indicates that eight posters were seen on the walls which contained sentences of either an inspirational or a general nature. The sentences in these posters, which were mainly commercially produced, often exhibited complex grammatical structures. Examples were “A nation that reads is a nation that grows” (Photograph 19) and “Let us make our schools centres of care and support” (see Photograph 2) and the clauses from the Freedom Charter in one room, e.g. “The doors of learning and culture shall be opened”, all of which are classified as inspirational text in Table 4. Another example of the use of complex and barely understandable sentences on commercially produced posters was the poster of road signs headed “Selected traffic signs, signals and markings for primary schools shapes and colours.”



Photograph 19: Inspirational text (A)

Three examples of locally made texts used for the purposes of classroom management were observed: a set of classroom rules (Photograph 20); a presentation of important school related information such as the name of the school, and principal's and teacher's names; and (towards the end of the observation period only) a very large class list with children's surnames, names and marks displayed, "to motivate them" (A, interview). The latter was not an extended text.



Photograph 20: Extended text: Classroom rules (N)

The most obvious place for children to encounter extended text in a classroom is in books. In these classrooms, two types of books were present:

1. Text books produced for instructional purposes.
2. “Library books” or “story books” (referred to as “trade books” in the TEX-IN3 inventory), which are not designed with specific instructional objectives in mind.

Mthembu JPS had enough copies of one set of text books for one Grade 1 class to use at a time. This set of books was moved from classroom to classroom as needed. This text book was designed for the Life Skills Learning Programme and contained text such as:

On a big poultry farm hens lay many eggs which the farmer sells. When the hens get old they are killed for their meat and sold. In this way the farmer makes money.

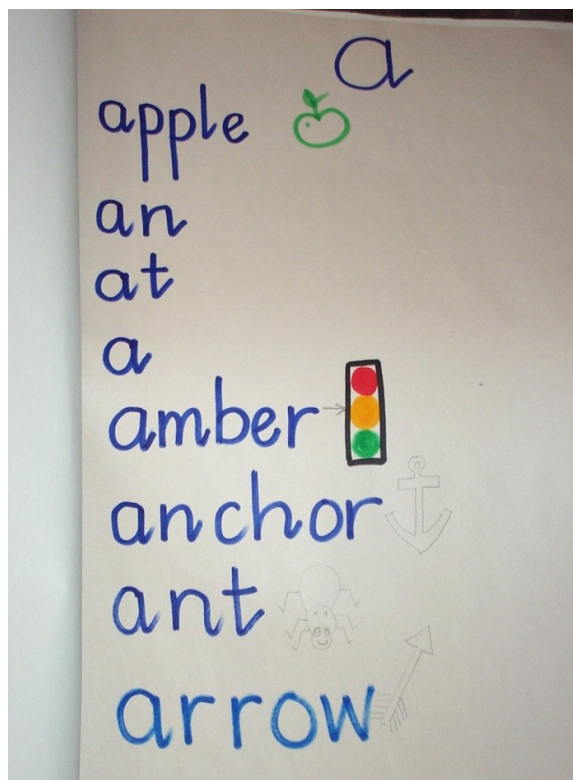
1. How can people help themselves to eat healthy food?
2. Why do people farm poultry?
3. Do you think a poultry farm should be near a big town or city? Why?

This text is far more grammatically and lexically complex than other sentences typically encountered by children in this case study. Teachers admitted that their learners would not be able to read and understand this text and said that they “just use the text book as the basis of a lesson,” (G, interview) without expecting children to even attempt to read the text.

None of the three classrooms had a dictionary, an atlas, or any other basic reference material, although one teacher was making an book of alphabetised lists of words which she called a dictionary (Photograph 21).

Mthembu JPS has a relatively well-stocked library, but there was a great paucity of library books in the actual classrooms and this was uneven across the rooms. Ms A.’s classroom had 39 library books visible, whereas in Ms G.’s classroom there were 2, and in Ms N.’s classroom, 6.

Ms A. had placed English and Afrikaans books no longer used by her own children in upturned cardboard boxes labelled “Reading Corner” in her classroom, and also kept a smaller number of books “for the teacher” on top of this collection (Photograph 22). Justifying the inclusion of Afrikaans titles in a classroom where the language was not spoken or learned, Ms A. argued that, “They can look at the pictures. That is a precursor for reading.”



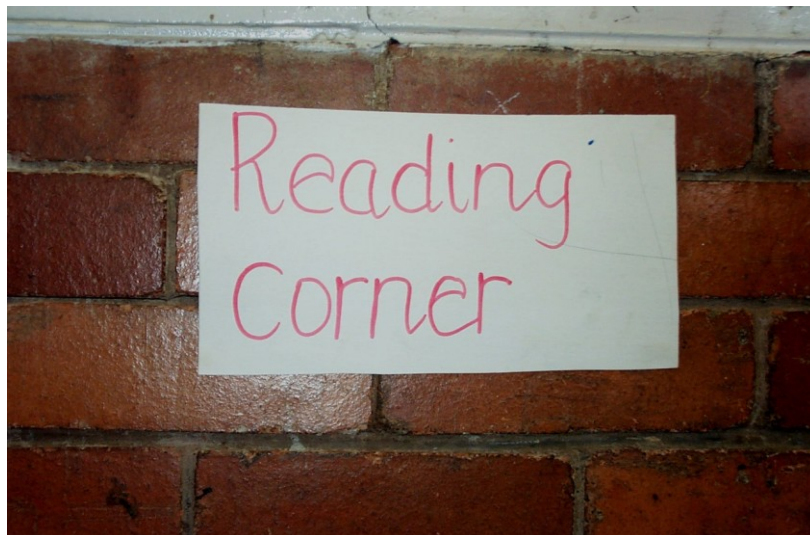
Photograph 21: Page from a locally made “dictionary” (N)

Titles of books in the collection for children were, for example “Arthyr’s funny money” and “Learn about football.” Few, if any, of these books could have been classified as quality children’s literature. The level of the books was not appropriate for Grade 1 children to read on their own, though most could have been read aloud to them, and though Grade 1 children could fruitfully look at and talk about the pictures. The teacher’s books included a “Treasury of fairy tales”, “First book of Bible stories” and “Classic verse and rhymes”.

In contrast, in Ms N.’s classroom a lovely sign announced a “Reading Corner” which neither had any books nor was a suitable space for reading (Photograph 23). This is another example of mimicry.



Photograph 22: Classroom library, with “teacher’s books” on top of the box (A)



Photograph 23: A Reading corner without any books (N)

In both the classrooms where a Reading Corner was labelled, the demarcated area was behind or next to the teacher’s desk. In their daily movements around the classroom, this area was, to all intents and purposes, out of bounds. The importance of the physical and psychological proximity of literacy resources to children has been emphasised by Neuman and Celano (2001), as discussed in Chapter 2. In this case study, the unspoken message of the positioning of the classroom libraries and the way the school library was used was that books are not for touching unless the teacher has given special permission. Student initiative and control was not encouraged in relation to handling books.

Children's work

None of the children's work displayed on the walls in this case study contained extended child-authored text. In all three classrooms there were displays of learners' drawings, usually with the learner's name written either by the child or the teacher. There were displays of pictures of robots, some tortoises and hares, sets of faces, sets of cut-out hands, and sets of South African flags (see Photographs 24 (a) and (b)).



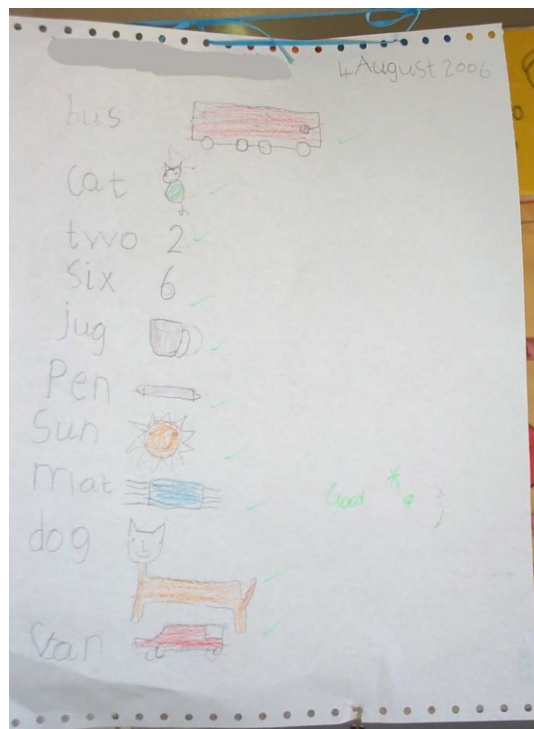
Photograph 24 (a)



Photograph 24 (b)

Photograph 24 (a) & (b): Children's work displayed (G, N)

Ms N. displayed exemplary student's work by tying it to a plastic line stretching across the room (Photograph 25). The work chosen for this “brag line” reflected neat copying of words already displayed on the alphabet charts, and none went beyond vocabulary already displayed in the classroom. This sent the unspoken message that neat copying was the most valued skill in the classroom. The teacher confirmed this during the transect walk, explaining that she chose “neat work” for this special display. The display line was above the heads of children in the class and thus inaccessible to them for reading. Thus although the children's work was valued it could not be used in support of learning in the classroom.



Photograph 25: Child's work displayed on a “brag line” (N)

At Mthembu JPS, each Grade 1 learner has three exercise books, one for work in each of the prescribed learning programmes, Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. These exercise books were kept in piles at the side of each classroom until needed, each with a different coloured cover (Photograph 26).

“Worksheets” completed by the learners were not uniformly stuck into these exercise books, and in all classrooms were observed lying haphazardly either on the teacher's desk or on side-tables. The impression was created that children and teachers did not place high value on keeping books clean and neat.



Photograph 26: Children's workbooks stored in classroom (A)

The Department of Education requires teachers to keep particular records of learners' work in portfolios. In this case study, the children's portfolios contained a worksheet on which learners had completed words by writing the initial letter D (Photograph 27); lists of words and pictures; and a worksheet which required children to paste the correct words under a series of pictures.



Photograph 27: Item in child's portfolio (A)

5.3.4 Teachers' categorisations of photographs of texts from transect walks

Sections 4.3.5, 4.4.2 and 4.5.1 explained the rationale and process for participatory gathering and analysis of the photographs taken of texts during the transect walk. In this exercise, each teacher worked individually with photographs from her own classroom. None of the three teachers responded to this exercise with the enthusiasm or ease I had anticipated. All showed a reticence (or possible reluctance) to physically handle and sort the photographs they were working with, preferring to point at photos or to talk about them. This was particularly so for the exercise in which they were free to choose how to categorise the pictures and for the time-line activity.

With regard to the undirected classification activity, Ms G. and Ms N. grouped together all the alphabet frieze pictures, saying, “I use these for Literacy” and all the number related photographs, saying, “We use these for Numeracy.” Both teachers placed pictures of animals, colours, road-signs and foods in a third group, which Ms N. described as, “For Life Skills” and Ms G. described as, “Content about animals, washing hands and parts of the body” (Ms G.). Their categorisations were thus essentially structural, in terms of the three Learning Programmes (or “subjects,” as Ms G. called them) described in the NCS. However the use of the first person pronouns “I” and “We” by both these teachers indicates that they were also thinking about these categories in relation to their daily work. Neither of these teachers focused on the learning or teaching potential offered by any of the texts in the photographs. In contrast, Ms A. created a grouping containing alphabet frieze pictures together with the photograph of “Our Sound Tree,” explaining her grouping as “These are for teaching your sounds or your phonics.” In this case she used a logic internal to reading theory to categorise the pictures. When requested to classify the same pictures in any different way, both Ms G. and Ms N. laughed nervously and declined. Ms A. produced a second classification in terms of the learning areas similar to the other two teachers’ classifications.

Following the undirected classification exercise, teachers were asked to choose pictures of the texts which were most valuable for teaching reading, and to arrange them in rank order. All three teachers easily and quickly identified pictures of alphabet charts/friezes as the most useful teaching aids. In addition, Ms A. identified the photograph of the sound tree (Photograph 31), and the “Story of Vivi” (Photograph 13). Ms N. also picked out the picture

of her Word Wall (Photograph 9b), a photograph of number symbols and words (Photograph 28a) and a birthday chart (showing the names of children who had birthdays each month) as valuable texts. Concerned that she might have misunderstood the task, I checked that the choice of numbers was intentional. Ms N. affirmed that she used the names of the numbers when teaching reading, saying that in the Foundation Phase there is not a strict distinction between learning programmes. She also explained that many children do not know their birth dates, so the birthday chart was an important teaching aid. Ms G. struggled to choose another photograph, and finally pointed to the picture of isiZulu words on the chalkboard (Photograph 3), explaining that in isiZulu “You can learn the sounds.” She also said that teaching the numbers was important. None of the teachers identified pictures of books as important texts for teaching reading.

By the time they were asked to conduct the time-ranking activity, all of the teachers showed reluctance to do the exercise. None physically placed photographs in position on this imaginary time line. All said that the alphabet charts/friezes were important all year through.

I did not push the teachers further on the time-line activity because it was becoming increasingly clear to me that the teachers did not feel comfortable with doing the participatory analysis tasks. I had included these tasks, and planned for a 5-pile sorting activity as well (see Section 4.4.3), with the intention of increasing their active involvement in data collection and analysis and levelling power relationships in this research, but realised that the teachers felt forced into doing something they did not want to do. The time these activities took was a problem for the teachers. In addition, they appeared to feel under the spotlight while doing these activities. Although I had discussed the rationale for participatory activities with the teachers beforehand, I do not think they fully bought in to the methodology. They were, however quite comfortable with completing the questionnaire. It is also possible that the teachers did not fully understand the concept of a time line and that this contributed to their difficulty with the final task. Another possible explanation for their reluctance is that the photographs of text did not fully capture what the teacher actually taught at any point. For example, as will be detailed below in the section on data gathered through interviews, Ms G. said that at the beginning of the year she introduced words starting with C, such as *cat* and *comb*, and then she moved on to H words like *hat* and *has*. “It is good to know one word at a

time, then two word sentences, then three words. By the end of Grade 1 they should read sentences.” It is arguable that she could not show this progression using the photographs of text.

Subsequent to conducting these participatory categorisation exercises I read about a similar activity conducted in research by Holland in 1981 (see Bernstein, 1990; Hoadley & Ensor, 2009), which helped to explain the teacher’s response to this categorisation exercise. In Holland’s research, seven year old children from working class and middle-class backgrounds were asked to group pictures of different food items and to give reasons for their groupings. Then they were asked to group the same pictures in a different way. Holland noted how working class children’s groupings made use of personalised, context-dependent criteria referring to everyday use (such as “I like those things” or “That’s what my mother cooks for breakfast”), and did not change their criteria when asked to do the exercise again. In contrast, middle class children sorted the pictures first in non context-dependent ways (such as by food category) and secondly using context-dependent criteria. Holland argued that the children had different “orientations to meaning”: Working class children had a restricted, community orientation to meaning, whereas the middle class children used both elaborated and restricted orientations to meaning.

The exercise I asked teachers to do was, I discovered, similar to that in the Holland study, though it focused on teachers rather than children. Like Holland, I found different orientations to meaning. Two teachers, Ms G. and Ms N., used context-dependent categorisations in this exercise, while Ms A. made use of a context-independent categorisation. Holland, and, in the South African context, Hoadley and Ensor (2009), have attempted to link such orientations to meaning to social class positioning of school students and, very recently, teachers. Existing research which explores the relationship between the social class backgrounds of teachers, their professional dispositions and their pedagogic practice assumes that teachers, by virtue of their jobs are middle class, and have middle-class orientations to meaning. This is in contrast to their students whose orientation to meaning is markedly different in different class contexts. The consequence, according to this line of thinking, is that working class students have a different orientation to meaning to their teachers, which contributes to their failure to meet the expectations of the schooling system.

Hoadley and Ensor (2009) have begun to treat such assumptions about teachers' social class position as problematic, arguing that many teachers in working-class settings in the South African context in fact occupy a "hybrid" class position (Hoadley & Ensor, 2009), with working-class material and social conditions of living despite the middle class nature of their jobs. They have been able to show differences between teachers occupying this hybrid class position and traditionally middle class teachers. For example, social class position is a factor in how teachers typify learners: "In the working-class context, the student is first a child and then a learner, and in the middle-class context, the student is first a learner and secondly a child" (Hoadley & Ensor, 2009, p. 880). They have also shown that teachers in different settings classify subject knowledge differently: in middle-class contexts teachers make choices about tasks on the basis of the potential they offer for children learning, but in working-class contexts teachers are generally more concerned about pupil's familiarity with and enjoyment of lessons than about their learning. Such differences are significant in structuralist explanations of the role of schooling, and particularly pedagogy, in social class reproduction (for example, studies in the Bernsteinian tradition).

The significance of my research to this field is the fact that in the same working-class school, teachers exhibited different orientations to meaning. As teachers' social class position was not an original concern in this research I did not intentionally gather the kind of data which made scientific analysis of class/orientation to meaning possible. The teachers' biographies recounted in Section 5.2.4 suggest that one explanation for these different orientations to meaning could relate to race and class. Another, possibly linked to race could be the nature of the initial teacher training institutions attended by the teachers. Alternatively, an explanation could be found in social capital theory. Ms A., the only teacher who used context-independent criteria in her classification of the photographs, had different social capital from the other teachers. Unlike the other teachers, she had contacts with business interests who donated old computers to the school, contacts with the Education Library Services (ELITS), as well as a friendly relationship with the school principal. She did her initial teacher training at a college perceived at the time to offer better quality teacher education than those attended by the other teachers, sent her own children to ex-model C schools and to university, spoke English as a home language and her husband worked for a large financial institution. In these respects her lifestyle and disposition were more aligned to the middle class, whereas the other two teachers' biographies suggest an orientation to the hybrid class of which Hoadley and Ensor speak.

5.3.5 Holistic analysis of texts using TEX-IN3 Rubric

The Tex-IN3 inventory included a rubric for holistic analysis of text in the classroom, which is included in Appendix 10. Using this rubric to analyse the text environment observed in this case study, I would classify the text environments as limited to inadequate (Rubric scores 4-5). The text environments are “severely limited and cannot be regarded as a meaningful resource for the majority of children”. As a resource they operate mainly at word level, encouraging the use of word level reading strategies only. Local texts dominate in these classrooms (in contrast to what the TEX-IN3 suggests), but are generally not extensive, functional, process oriented or generated with student input. Worksheets are restrictive. Whole class use of texts dominates and few texts meet the needs of struggling or highly skilled readers.

I used a second rubric from the TEX-IN3 instruments, included in Appendix 11, to rate the teacher’s holistic understanding of the texts in the classrooms in this case. In the TEX-IN3 process this rubric was used to analyse data gathered from teacher interviews. In the case of this research it was used to analyse the teachers’ understandings of texts after the transect walk. In terms of this rubric I would rate the understanding of classroom texts by teachers in this case as basic (rubric score 3). The teachers demonstrated a basic understanding of how and why the texts in the classroom were used, but they did not show understanding of text functions and did not appreciate fully the pedagogic value of extended texts. The teachers were aware of some of the limitations of text in their rooms, such as the lack of graded readers, and one of them tried to do something about the lack of reading books in her classroom (which would give her a slightly higher rating on the rubric). However, the teachers had a limited conception of the reading process and how texts could be used to achieve learning outcomes believing that it was necessary to focus on word level work.

5.3.6 Summary of key findings from transect walk

The key findings from the transect walk were that students encountered a high proportion of isolated or single words in this case, and the focus of reading instruction in Grade 1 was on sound, letter and word level work. Where extended and connected text was used in the

classroom it was often neither particularly interesting, motivating nor linked to everyday literacy functions, and it was often not written in correct paragraph form. These findings were indeed triangulated by other methods of data collection, as the sections which follow detail.

5.3.7 Observations of reading lessons

Observation of Literacy lessons at Mthembu JPS provided rich data about how teachers taught reading, and about the texts they used for this. Although lessons were only observed in the second half of the year, teachers affirmed that their general approach during the observation period was similar to their general approach throughout the year. Observations corroborated the key finding from the transect walk and analysis of texts, namely that a high proportion of single words were used in instruction which focused on sounds, letters and words. In this section I begin by making some general observations about the structure and timing of lessons observed, and about the use of English and isiZulu in the lessons. I then discuss observations of sub-word level (e.g. letters and sounds), word level and extended text level work. It should be noted that I observed very similar lessons in all three classrooms in this study on a number of occasions over the period of data collection, and that although each teacher's individuality was clearly stamped on the way the lessons were taught (for example one teacher gave the chalk to learners to write on the board whereas the other teachers reserved this power for themselves), the general trend of the lessons was similar in all cases.

Structure of lessons and language of instruction

All the designated Literacy lessons I observed were taught after break. Numeracy was routinely taught first thing in the day, because, teachers argued, children need fresh brains for numeracy work. All the lessons I observed took place in the classrooms, though on other occasions I observed children practicing their writing outside, using chalk to write words on paving bricks in the schoolyard, as illustrated in Photograph 28. Reading was taught discretely from other subjects, with the exception of isiZulu reading and writing. Thus, for example, a Life Skills lesson focusing on "Traditional foods" was not linked to a Literacy lesson focusing on "Healthy me", and the Life Skills lesson involved neither reading nor writing. In addition Life Skills was taught primarily through the medium of isiZulu, whereas Literacy was taught through the medium of English. Similarly, Numeracy lessons were

treated discretely from Literacy lessons, notwithstanding the statement by Ms N. reported in the previous section that the boundaries between subjects are blurred in the Foundation Phase.



Photograph 28: Children writing words with chalk on paving

Classroom observations over the period of data collection showed that, although English was the official medium of instruction in the school, a great deal of isiZulu was in fact spoken in the classrooms by both teachers and children. Numeracy and Life Skills classes were conducted largely in isiZulu. Code switching between languages was almost seamless in all classes. Here is an example of code-switching in a Literacy class:

- A: Now I want you to read these words with me. Door, Look, Wool, Wood, Look, Food, Moon. *(Teacher points to each word 3 times and children repeat the words after her – chant and response continues for some length of time. Then a child is chosen to point at the words and lead the reading.)*
- CC: Door, door, door, look, look, look, wool, wool, wool, etc
(Teacher notices one child who is not focusing on this task.)
- A: Ayanda, over here! Ok, again! *(Teacher points to words without saying them.)*
- CC: Door, door, door, look, look, look, wool, wool, wool, etc
(Teacher notices a disturbance, but does not realise what it is about.)
- A: Hey stop fighting! Thabile, ufuna ngikushaye? (Thabile, Do you want me to hit you?)

- A: Right! *(Teacher points at words and children chant. Many are not looking at the words on the board. Children clamour to be called on to be next to lead the reading, flicking their hands in the air and calling the teacher's name.)*
- A: Uyahlupha (you are causing chaos)!
- A: Ja, next one! *(She points at another child to lead the pointing and chanting. The child takes some time getting up to the front of the room.)*
- A: Hurry up, hurry up! Aloud! *(Children shout louder responses.)*
- A: *(While the chanting continues...)* Who's fighting, who's fighting? Ngizoshaya niyezwa! (I'm going to hit you, do you hear!)
(Teacher realises that the argument is over an exercise book. Children have anticipated what the next step in the lesson will be and are getting their books out.)
- A: Elabani i-exercise? (Whose exercise book is it?) Ubani uthe shiyani ama-exercise books ekhaya ehomework? (Who told you to leave your homework exercise book at home?).
(Teacher abandons the chanting exercise and gives the class homework.)
- A: You are going to copy that work in your exercise books and then you go home and read. This is your homework for Friday. Bhala siyezwane! (Write, do you hear me!). Ngizomarka ngolwesihlanu siyezwana. (I am going to mark it on Friday.) Sezwane? Sezwane? (Do you hear? Do you hear?)

This extract demonstrates how isiZulu was commonly used for classroom management, including discipline in Literacy lessons.

As beginning English Language Learners, the children in these classes had limited English vocabulary. They were also taught a limited vocabulary. The teaching of new vocabulary generally occurred in relation to a spelling pattern being taught, and involved simple presentation of the new word in English and translation of this word into isiZulu by either the teacher or children in the class. In the example which follows, the teacher made use of the fact that different children had different levels of existing knowledge of English to provide a translation of the word.

- G: Right, another word that has two Os is moon, moon. What is a moon in Zulu?
- CC: Nyanga.
- G: Moon, nyanga. Moon, nyanga, Moon, nyanga.

All the lessons I observed were planned for the Literacy Learning Programme of the curriculum and focused on reading. None focused on other aspects of the Literacy curriculum such as primarily on handwriting, writing, listening or speaking skills. This could be because the teachers knew that I was investigating teaching reading, although they were asked to simply teach according to their existing plans when I was present. Although I did observe lessons based on reading extended text, the focus of the majority of lessons I observed in all three classrooms was decoding individual words.

The most common structure of Literacy lessons involved the learners, as a whole class, reading and re-reading words and sometimes sentences with the teacher. A few learners were then asked to read aloud individually in front of the class, usually leading the class in rereading what had been read first with the teacher. Writing (in the form of copying words or sentences from the board, or inserting missing letters or words or letters) sometimes followed such a reading exercise. There was minimal focus on meaning as learners read the sentences aloud or copied them into their books, and I witnessed numerous cases of “barking at print” as this extract from my journal illustrates:

After completing their worksheet by filling in OO in all the words, the teacher invites me to help mark books. A queue of children brings me their work to look at. Ticking is simple – all they had to do was to write lots of OOs. Then I write “You are a good boy” and ask them to read what I have written. I am pleased at how many can read these simple sentences but really surprised that many children show no reaction whatsoever to being called good. I ask “Who is good?” and they just stand there, saying nothing, looking blank. Then I say “YOU are good” and tickle them and it finally clicks that I am actually trying to tell them something meaningful about themselves.

Timed repeated reading of extended texts (usually about half a page long) is a commonly used strategy to improve fluency of struggling readers in South Africa. In this case, however, the reading and rereading of extended texts was practiced in a singsong rather than a fluent manner, without emphasis on meaningful phrasing, expression, accuracy or fluency. Repeated reading of extended text can thus be understood as a form of drill in this case. Repeated readings of words in lists are also examples of the use of drill, suggesting a behaviourist understanding of how children learn to read.

Reading was taught largely from text written on the blackboard. There were thus limited opportunities for children to practice and learn concepts of print which require the physical handling of a book (such as where to start reading in a book, how to turn pages and the link

between pictures and words). However, the teaching of other concepts of print which do not have to be learned from books were also never observed. For example, I observed no focus on any of the features of a sentence such as the use of capital letters, the use of punctuation marks, the need to space words or directionality of reading. The importance of children developing these concepts of print was discussed in Chapter 2, and considering that half the children in Grade 1 in this case had not attended Grade R classes, one would have expected to have seen these concepts being developed during their Literacy lessons.

Almost all the lessons I observed were entirely undifferentiated for different learners. On only two occasions did I observe teachers giving different work to groups of children at different developmental levels. At the end of the lesson focusing on consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words outlined above, after 10 minutes of word and letter level practice involving the letter O, Ms A. instructed the class to take out their exercise books and to “start writing” the words she had written on the board, each of which was followed by a simple drawing representing the word. The words were p_t (*pot*), d_t (*dot*), y_y_ (*yo yo*), b_x (*box*), f_x (*fox*), l_g (*log*.) She instructed the class to “Say /o/ while you are writing pot, dot, yo yo, box, fox, log.” She called a small group of 5 children to the carpet at the front of the room, gave each a small blackboard and chalk and instructed them to write Os on their boards. Ms A. explained to me that this small group were “naughty children” who were being “punished.” While the rest of the class did the exercise they had been set, the teacher ignored this small group for a while. They struggled to settle to the task they had been given. After about 5 minutes Ms A. focused on the small group and demonstrated to them how to write *pot* by sounding the letters and writing them down. She then left them to get on with the same exercise as the rest of the class, and turned to marking the work of the children who had completed the task, who were now queuing at her desk. The teacher marked their work by checking that they had correctly written in the missing Os in the words, but did not ask children to read the words to her. The first three children to have their work marked were given work cards to do (see Photographs 14 a and b, and Photographs 15 a and b). Others simply returned to their seats with nothing to do after their work had been marked.

In the other case, Ms N. gave the class a similar task to copy words from the board into their exercise books and to fill in the missing letters. Four children were, however, given blank sheets of paper. The teacher wrote each child’s name on the pages and told the children to copy” their names. Later she explained that these children were not yet able to write their

names independently and she wanted them to practice doing so before doing the exercises other children did.

Observations of teaching at the sub-word level

All the lessons I observed began with recitation, usually of the letters of the alphabet and children's rhymes. Classroom observations for this study were carried out in the eighth month of the year and at this stage, children were still required to chant the letters of the alphabet on a daily basis. This was routinely done in all classrooms at the start of the Literacy lesson after return from break, and initiated by the teacher calling out "A, B, C..." in a reciting kind of tone. Children recited by rote, without reference to written letters (e.g. on the alphabet charts) and always beginning with A and ending with Z. I did not witness any examples of practicing alphabetical order. Further information about teaching the alphabet was gleaned from interviews with teachers and will be reported later in the chapter.

Observations of teaching at the word level

In keeping with the data from the transect walk which showed that learners encounter many more single words than full sentences in this case, I observed a very great emphasis on word level work in the classrooms in this study. The most common practice observed in the classrooms was the teaching of groups of words with similar spellings (but not necessarily similar sounds). A vignette of such a lesson dealing with the double-O spelling was described in Section 5.3.1 of this chapter. The teaching of common English spelling patterns occurred in a formulaic fashion, without taking into account different pronunciations of homographs. For example, as already explained teachers did not help children to notice or understand the fact that /oo/ is pronounced differently in *good*, *door* and *pool*. It must be added that no child asked a question about this either. Another example of a teacher not dealing with different pronunciations and meanings of homographs was observed in a lesson relating to 3-letter consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. The extract below is given in detail because it also demonstrates a slightly different kind of lesson.

A: *(Whole class activity, which takes 4 minutes. Teacher writes O on the board.)* Tell me what this is.

CC: /o/, /o/, /o/, /o/, /o/, /o/, /o/,

- A: What is this? (*Writes the other vowels on the board and children chorus the short vowel sounds.*)
- CC: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/
- All: (*Teacher writes words pot, can, pen, peg and mug on the board, and leads children in reading them in chorus for 5 minutes.*) pot, can, pen, peg, mug. (*repeated*)
- A: (*Teacher cleans the board and rewrites a list of the vowels and the word “p_t”.*) What can we put in there? (*Pointing to the gap in the word, “p_t”*)
- C1: /o/ pot.
- A: What else?
- C2: /a/ pat.
- A: Show me pat. Look on the wall for pat. (*3 children fail in their attempts to find the word written on the classroom walls. The 4th child shows it on the isiZulu/English verb poster which says “mbambatha, pat.”*)
- A: What else can we use?
- C3: Put (*Pronounced with short vowel sound to rhyme with but.*)
- A: Daddy uses a putter when he puts. (*She is referring to the game of golf, which is probably totally alien to the learners, with no explanation. The teacher ignores the fact that the child has not said what vowel can be used to make this word.*)
- Or we can use another word put. (*Rhyming with foot. The teacher does not draw attention to the different sound of the vowel in this case.*)
- C4: Pet.
- A: What is a pet?
- C5: Cat.
- A: Your pet at home. A pet is a dog or cat.

In contrast to the above approach, which uses synthetic (building up) phonics, Ms G. used an analytic approach for the same lesson. She wrote the words *look, food, wool, foot, door, book* and *moon* on the board, translating each word into isiZulu and getting the class to read the words three times each with her leading. Then she asked, “Who can tell me what is the relationship between these words?” The children chorused “O”, which she accepted and expanded to say “They all have double O.”

Thus although all teachers in the case emphasised the use of phonics in reading, they did not take a uniform approach to how phonics should be taught, with both analytic and synthetic

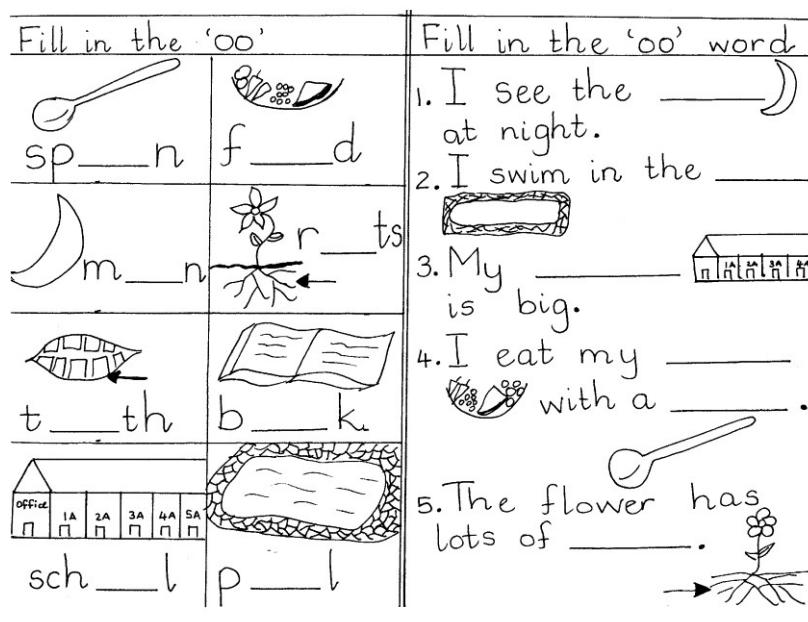
phonics featuring, and they did not teach it in such a manner that helped learners to understand that in English there is not one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. In all lessons I observed, new words were introduced individually and out of context first and later placed in sentences by the teacher. Typically, children did not make up the sentences, but were required to provide the missing word in a sentence given by the teacher, as in:

N: We swim in the... ?

CC: Pool

When learners encountered words in sentences, they had previously been taught a spelling pattern in one of the words. The sentences used in such practice served no real communicative function and were unlinked by either systemic functional structure or meaning to other sentences encountered on that day.

In most cases a written activity followed the oral reading of words and placing them in sentences. Often this written activity involved copying down the list of words (as in the extract above demonstrating the use of code-switching). In other cases, a worksheet was provided for learners to complete. Worksheets were usually custom-made by one of the teachers, usually Ms A. by virtue of being the official leader or co-ordinator of the Grade 1 teachers. A typical example is given below (in order to build up a coherent picture of how lessons connect, the example I have chosen continues the series of lessons on the double-O spelling). The first part of the written activity based on the double-O lesson required the learners simply to add in the missing letters OO to various words (Photograph 29). The second part of the worksheet required learners to identify words to write from their pictures and to fill in these words. If a learner had noticed the connection between the pictures in the first and second parts of the worksheet, they would have been able to do this by simply copying.



Photograph 29: Typical written exercise based on spelling pattern.

The following extract details how Ms A introduced the worksheet and gave instructions for completing it:

(Teacher hands out worksheet and instructs children to write their names on the back. Some children cannot write their names, and she does this for them.)

A: We are going to read the paper. Siyafunda la (Read here). Let us fill in /oo/. Look at the first one there. What is that?

CC: Spoon.

A: I eat with my spoon. Now write /oo/ there.

(A similar process is followed with all the words in part 1 of the worksheet, with teacher guiding children to fill in the missing sounds.)

A: *(Regarding the second half of the worksheet.)* Let us read these sentences. All of you read here. "I see the ...?"

CC: Moon.

All: *(Led by teacher in chorus)* I see the moon. *(repeated 5 times)*

A: Finger on the words. Bhala igama uthi moon. (Write the word that says moon)

(Some children just write OO, or even OOOOO. Teacher chooses 3 children to check that the others are writing moon "in the right place".)

The first part of this written exercise was not at all cognitively demanding, because it did not require any choice of letters to write or the application of any principles to the task. When learners had finished the worksheet they took their work to the teacher for marking. She ticked the correct OOs without asking learners to read the words aloud.

One of the three teachers taught what she called “sight words.” Vignette 2 in Section 5.3.1 of this chapter details such a lesson. Both regular and irregular words were included on the sight-word flash cards. I did not observe the teachers in this study drawing the learners’ attention to any features of the words which might assist them in recognizing the words by sight such as paying attention to the shape of the word or using the routine of looking at the words, saying them out loud and writing them down immediately. Neither did I observe the flash cards being used to get children to practice specific phonic principles.

As detailed in Chapter 2, phonemic awareness, which is an oral skill associated with sounds in words, contributes to children’s ability to read. At the time of this research, the KZN Department of Education was promoting the concept of phonemic awareness (personal communication with Wilson, 2006, KZNDE Deputy Director in charge of reading curriculum). However, the only examples of deliberate phonemic awareness development I observed at Mthembu JPS were the pat/put/pot lesson described above, and the homework part of the isiZulu lesson detailed in Vignette 3 in Section 5.3.1, in which students had to change the vowel sounds to create new words. Though neither of these examples were wholly oral activities, they fostered awareness of the possibility of sound manipulation and I therefore class them as phonemic awareness activities

Recognizing rhyme is helpful in anticipating meaning and working out new words. Rhyming is part of phonemic awareness. I observed no examples of conscious *working* with rhyme at Mthembu JPS, although all the teachers made extensive use of getting learners to recite “poems”, and two of the teachers had rhyme/poetry books in their classrooms. The recitation of verses was done with a keen sense of rhythm in most cases. Although not part of this study, I observed this lack of awareness of rhyme with the same group of children involved in this study when they were in Grade 2. Having read them the story of the Little Gingerbread Man a number of times I found that they were unable to identify which word should come next in the story of the Little Gingerbread Man: “Run, run, run, as fast as you can, you can’t catch me I’m a gingerbread...”

The observation made earlier in this chapter that little metalanguage was used in texts in the classroom was corroborated by a focused observation of oral use of metalanguage in Ms A.'s classroom over three periods of two and a half hours each, which revealed that the teacher seldom used metalanguage. The teacher was also observed using words about language incorrectly and confusingly. For example, she said to her class, “/g/ /r/ /o/ /w/, grow. Listen to the **words** /g/ /r/ /o/ /w/, grow” (A). Table 5, which details the findings from this focused observation, demonstrates a wide range of metalanguage which could have been used in the classroom and shows how seldom it was in fact used by the teacher observed. Children were not observed using any metalanguage at all.

In classroom observations there were many missed opportunities for teachers to use metalanguage. For example, as described above, the teacher who wanted the class to recite the alphabet chanted, “A, B, C...” loudly in a reciting tone and her students joined in. However, she could just as easily have said “Let’s say the alphabet together”.

***Table 5: Metalinguistic terminology used by Teacher A
over three 2 ½ hour observations (Adapted from Wray et al., 2002)***

	Number of times teacher heard using it	Number of times students heard using it
Word level		
Alphabet	2	None
Beginning sound		
Blend		
Consonant		
Definition		
Diagraph		
End sound		
Homophone		
Letter		
Magic / silent e		
Middle sound		
Prefix		
Rhyme		
Sound		
Vowel	1	
Word	6 (note on 3 occasions teacher referred to letters as words)	
Word family		
Sentence level		
Apostrophe		None
Capital letter		

Contraction		
Describing word/ adjective		
Doing word/verb		
Full stop		
Inverted comma		
Noun		
Question mark		
Sentence	1	
Word order		
Text level		
Address		None
Caption		
Character		
Drafting		
Ending		
Expression		
Fiction		
Headings		
Image		
Instructions		
Key word		
Label		
List		
Meaning		
Non-fiction		
Opening		
Paragraph		
Picture	7	
Predict		
Revising (plan, draft, revision)		
Scanning		
Setting		
Skimming		
Story	2	
Range of text types		
Author		None
Cover		
Dictionary		
Hardback		
Illustrator		
Nursery rhyme		
Paperback		
Picture		
Play		
Poem	1	
Recipe		
Script		
Story	1	

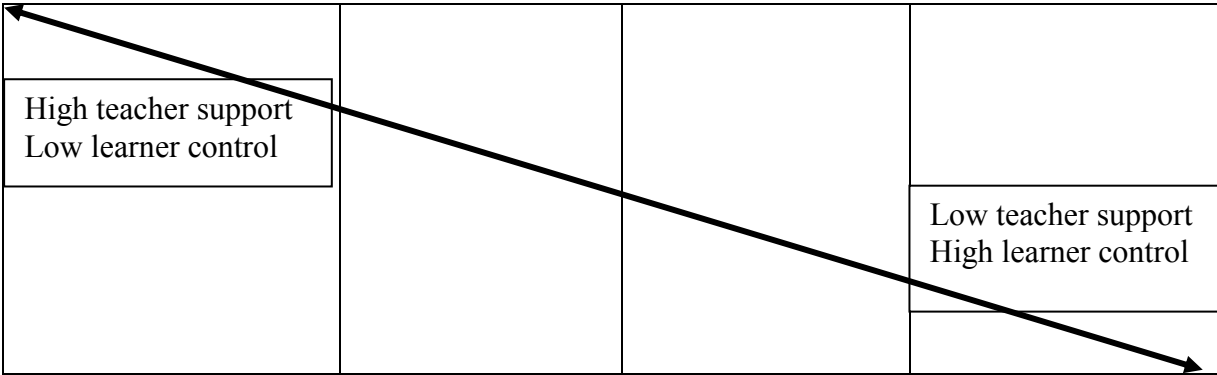
One of the debates about teaching at the word level centres around the extent to which phonics in particular, and other word attack strategies, should be explicitly taught. Explicit teaching has been particularly advocated as a preferred pedagogy for poor and otherwise disadvantaged students, as was discussed in Chapter 2. Explicit teaching at the word level would involve the teacher demonstrating these strategies in a carefully sequenced programme, talking (using metalanguage) about what each strategy is, how to use it, when to use it and so on. In relation to the phonics-based lessons observed in this case study, teaching was explicit to the extent that sounding out words was regularly demonstrated and drilled. However the teaching was not explicit in terms of the different pronunciation of graphemes, the use of other word attack strategies besides sounding out, the use of appropriate metalanguage and, at the extended text level, comprehension skill development.

Observations of teaching at the extended text level

There are many ways in which learners can practice reading extended texts. I have arranged my observations of the use of extended text in reading lessons in relation to four common modes of reading practice, namely demonstration (modelled), joint activity (shared reading), supported activity (guided reading) and individual activity (independent reading) (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Wray, 1998). This is a model of gradual release of teacher control and increasing learner independence consistent with a Vygotskian understanding of learning. In modelled reading, the teacher selects and reads a text to the learners. Although learners are not strictly practicing reading, they learn about how different texts are put together, they learn to enjoy reading and they can see their teacher modelling reading for them. In shared reading the teacher uses an enlarged text (e.g. charts with large writing or Big Books) so that all the learners can see. Learners read aloud, together with the teacher. The texts are often read more than once. Typically, there is some group problem solving and a lot of conversation about the meaning of the text. In guided reading the teacher works with small groups of learners at a time. Often each learner has a copy of the same reading book, though in some variations the learners work on entirely different texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The teacher helps the learners to read the books for themselves. Readers try to solve their problems independently, with some support from the teacher where necessary. In independent reading, learners read on their own, or they read to a partner, ideally reading self-selected materials. They independently solve their reading problems. Little or no teacher support is needed. They can read charts, writing displayed around the

room, or books. Listed in this order, the learner has increasing control in these modes of practice, as is illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15: The relationship between teacher support and learner control for different kinds of reading practice
(Adapted from Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)



High teacher support Low learner control			
			Low teacher support High learner control
Demonstrated activity Reading aloud	Joint activity Shared reading	Supported activity Guided reading	Individual activity Independent reading

During the six-month observation period, and during my frequent visits to the school over a period of five years, I did not observe any teachers reading aloud in any grade in the school. However, teachers reported that they did read aloud, and I did see books in all three classrooms which teachers claimed to have read aloud. In one case, a book which had been used for reading aloud was seen lying on the floor beneath the teacher's chair and in another case the book was partially buried beneath an old newspaper on a desk. The positioning of these books made me question how recently they had been used. Another form of modelled reading would have been the teachers modelling or at least talking about their own independent reading of books, newspapers or magazines for their own purposes, but again this was not observed at any stage.

Shared reading practice, in which the teacher and students read together from a large-script extended text, was a feature of every lesson I observed. Examples have already been given in previous sections, such as Vignettes 1 and 2. In most cases the texts used for this reading were locally produced, and the texts were more often physically and conceptually separate sentences rather than coherent text. I observed no instances of the use of Big Books for

shared reading, although such large format books were present in two of the classrooms and in the school library.

Guided reading practice, in which the teacher provides individualised attention or instruction to a learner or small group of learners reading a text which is carefully matched to the learner's instructional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), was not observed in this case. In its most common form in South African schools, guided reading involves differentiated reading groups reading aloud sections from a reader to the teacher, who offers assistance where necessary. Mthembu JPS, in its first year of teaching through the medium of English, had no such readers available. Neither did the teachers use the locally-produced texts mentioned above for the purpose of guided reading practice.

Independent reading practice, I observed, seldom happened and was reserved for those who completed their work quickly. Over the six month observation period, I only observed one occasion on which children used library books in their classroom. On this occasion, some children had completed a worksheet ahead of others in the class, and were rewarded by the teacher by being permitted to “look at books” from the classroom Reading Corner, as illustrated in Photograph 30. From this photograph it can be seen how a number of children shared the same book, some accessing it upside down. It was not clear to me why they all shared the same book, as other titles were available in the room.



Photograph 30: Children reading a book as a reward for completing work (A)

At the time of this research, the Department of Education was beginning to insist that all pupils should read individually for 30 minutes a day. This strategy was included in the KwaZulu-Natal Reading Policy Guidelines (South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2006) and the Reading Promotion Handbook (South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, n.d.), both of which had been distributed to schools at the time of this research. It was formalised in national policy in the Foundations for Learning Campaign in 2008 (South Africa. Department of Education, 2008a). At the time of this research, as detailed in the next section, the teachers in this case study were aware of this idea. I never once observed any child involved in individual reading over a sustained period of time, either during the formal data collection period or during my five year association with the school. However, during their scheduled periods in the library, which did not happen regularly, children were able to choose and read books.

The analysis of the reading practice activities which took place in this case shows that shared practice was the most common activity, with very little modelled, guided or independent reading taking place. In the absence of guided and independent reading practice, learners remained dependent on the teacher and one another as they read.

At the extended text level as well as at the word level, teaching in this case was not explicit. No strategies for comprehension of text were observed being explicitly taught.

5.3.8 Information provided by teacher's interviews

A key focus of the post-observation interviews was to gather data regarding what teachers were attempting to achieve in observed lessons and to explore their methodologies and motivations, as will be detailed shortly. However, the interviews also yielded information regarding the process of learning Literacy over the course of Grade 1 and how teachers planned and prepared their work, and this section begins with this aspect of the findings.

Planning for Literacy teaching

The three Grade 1 teachers in this case study taught roughly the same things at the same time in all three Learning Programmes. They explained that they planned their work together and

used the same resources (such as texts or worksheets). While it was not the intention of this research to focus in detail on curriculum planning, this does shed light on teaching objectives, sequencing and pacing. The planning process was led by Ms A., who was the official co-ordinator of the teachers in the Grade. At the weekly and daily level of planning, Ms A.'s influence was evident in the production of worksheets, items for the portfolio, locally made dictionaries and story books. Teachers did not refer to any role played by the Head of Department (Foundation Phase) in the planning process.

Planning at the yearly level was a problem. In August when I gathered data, all three teachers were reluctant to share with me their yearly planning, saying that they were "behind." In the third term, the teachers were still working with their plans for term 1, which involved :

- Recognition and copying of own name;
- Giving daily news;
- Listening to a story and reading from books;
- Discussing a story from pictures (oral work);
- Action stories involving correct sequence of facts;
- Observation of detail (in jigsaw puzzles, matching shapes, matching colours, materials etc.).

Discussing this scheme of work, Ms A. said, "This is what we planned to do, but the major problem is the language." She explained that the plan was not working for them because learners were so weak in English.

Although their written plans were weak or non-existent, teachers did have a clear idea of what they aimed to teach children at different stages of the year. As already discussed, in the participatory categorisation exercise, teachers highlighted the importance of alphabet charts in teaching at the start of the year, and in fact all the year through. This was corroborated in interviews. Asked to name the most important things children need to learn when they first encounter reading, teachers responded:

First they need to learn vowels. (N)
 They have to know the letters of the alphabet. (G)
 It is very important to do the sounds every day. (A)
 They refer to the alphabet when they have to spell. (G)

When asked what they expect learners to be able to do by the end of Grade 1, one teacher mentioned being able to “sound out” and to read lists of words, and “perhaps” to be able to read a short sentence (N). Another teacher said:

- A: I would like to take them through a list of words, some of the phonics words and see if they are able to recognise the words, break them up, sound them out, put them together. Are they able to read? Fluency is not important to me now but by the end of the year I would like to at least see them reading a sentence or sentences fluently.

The teachers did not expect the children to be able to write their own sentences in Grade 1, though “some of them can do it at the end of the year” (N). None of the teachers in this case mentioned understanding the meaning of words or texts in their descriptions of what learners should be able to achieve. Indeed, as the last-quoted interview extract shows, the emphasis was fairly and squarely on breaking up, sounding out and recognising words.

The teachers argued that what their learners could achieve in Grade 1 was affected by whether or not they had attended Grade R. In 2006, only half the children in Grade 1 at Mthembu JPS had attended Grade R. This caused problems for the Grade 1 teachers:

- A: Most of our children are not school ready. Our kids who come from our own Grade R can sit and listen. They are learning discipline and how to behave in school. Other children still scream and shout.

Ms A. went on to explain that the children who have not attended Grade R do not know how to go to the toilet independently, wash their hands, stand in a line or sit quietly. She regarded the key function of Grade R as ensuring independent school-appropriate behaviour.

This limited perspective on the educational role of Grade R education is perhaps related to the lack of understanding revealed in interviews about how children develop, especially how literacy develops. As far as literacy development is concerned, the teachers in this case regarded children who just “look at the pictures” as being “unable to read” (G, N, A). They were unable to identify the different developmental achievements of learners and described learners who have not yet achieved the average levels of reading proficiency as “weak.” When asked if they had heard the term “emergent literacy”, two teachers said definitely not, and the third (Ms A.) thought that she might have read about it somewhere, but could not recall what it meant.

Teachers found assessment as required by the Department of Education complicated and time-consuming. The National Curriculum Statement gives a large range of assessment standards covering five learning outcomes in Literacy, which should be attained by the end of the first year at school, but does not provide the teacher with a specific benchmark by which to make an integrated assessment of learner's achievements. This is a source of frustration to teachers: "We do not know how to use this assessment" (G). The lack of specificity of achievement standards for Grade 1 had serious consequences, as this observation from my journal of involvements at the school shows:

I saw a Grade 3 teacher in the corridor with eight or ten learners today. The children were kneeling on the concrete floor, using chairs as desks, and she had a piece of chart paper with the letters of the alphabet stuck onto the corridor wall. "I discovered that these children cannot write their names," she explained, "So I am starting from the beginning again with them. The rest of the class is working inside. Can you believe that they have got to Grade 3 without anyone noticing that they can't write their names?"

Homework is not sent home regularly at Mthembu JPS, though as indicated already in transcripts from lessons above, it is sometimes sent home. A teacher explained:

N: One day I asked a child "Why didn't you do your homework?" and he said, "My mother said you [the teacher] are the one that is supposed to do the homework, not me [the mother], because you are the one who gets paid." So because of the parents I don't send homework every day.

Common "reading problems"

A composite list of what the teachers defined as "reading problems" was drawn up from the interviews. Teachers estimated that more than half the children in Grade 1 and also Grade 2 at the school experienced these problems. I have categorised the list of "problems" identified by the teachers in the list below for ease of analysis.

Problems related to language of learning and teaching

There are many language barriers in the systems;

Lack of association for English words;

Problems with English pronunciation;

First and second language confusion.

Problems relating to lack of concepts of print and emergent literacy

Children have not been to Grade R;
 They do not hold books properly;
 They are not familiar with books;
 They confuse left and right;
 They chant instead of read;
 They read loudly – silent reading is difficult for them;
 They do picture reading (make up stories from the pictures).

Problems at the sound and letter level

They confuse their vowels;
 They struggle to blend letters;
 They do not know phonics;
 They confuse letters (e.g. b and d);
 They jumble up letters (e.g. “and” becomes “nda”);
 They scribble.

Problems at the word level

They memorise letters and put them together with no sequence;
 They have poor word recognition.

Problems at the extended text level

They use some words from memory which are completely inappropriate, usually making use of the first sound;

A number of these “reading problems” simply reflect the different developmental stages that children are at and are problems only in that the children have not achieved the expected milestones for their school grade. As can be seen from the teacher’s list, many of the problems children experience are not about reading per se. They are problems of learning in a language with which they are unfamiliar, problems of lack of experience with books, and problems relating to having limited reading strategies at their disposal.

In identifying children's reading problems teachers emphasised the inadequate use of phonic cues. While they identified that some children made meaningless substitutions when reading, they did not pick up on whether the children were able identify that their reading did not make sense, and make appropriate adjustments. The teachers made no mention of other reading strategies such as reading ahead or back, use of syntactic cues, using parts of words as clues, predicting, looking at pictures and so on. In other words, the teacher's list of the reading "problems" children encountered showed the priority teachers gave to phonic cues when reading, and their lack of awareness of other reading strategies which learners could find useful.

Teaching at the letter level

Although all the teachers believed that the starting point for learning to read must be letter and phonic knowledge, they all had different conceptions of what this means practically.

The teachers presented letters in a predetermined, but not uniform, order. One teacher reported starting with letters with a rounded shape (in other words, the letters A, C, O, D, Q) "because at the beginning of the year they have to start with the circle" (N), while another starts with the vowels (A). I did not notice this early enough to explore the implications in a group discussion, which is a limitation of this research. All the teachers reported beginning with teaching lower-case letters, expecting to move on to capital letters in the final term of the year. This may explain why they did not talk about the use of capital letters in their shared reading texts. However, the alphabet charts in the room included both capital and lower-case letters and the children's drawings of their classrooms contained letters in both cases.

Teacher interviews confirmed my observation that daily rote practice of reciting the letters of the alphabet is considered important by the teachers in this case, as the following extract shows:

N: Every day after break we have to do the sounds. Now I have started from A up to Z now because most of them know all the sounds. Then I say, give me any word that starts with the letter O and then they look here (points to alphabet frieze) and they say orange.

Teachers reported different ways of handling the teaching of letter names and sounds. One teacher's approach was to focus on the sounds that letters make:

- A: There is a lot of incidental learning at the beginning, so you have the numbers and the names and the days of the week and the letters of the alphabet as well. Some of them come in knowing the alphabet song (*sings "A, B, C" etc*), and when I begin teaching phonics I put the letter we have learned onto the Sound Tree. The vowels are a different colour. Every time we learn a new letter we put the letter onto the tree. Because we have now finished 26 letters, all the letters are on the tree (*see Photograph 31*).
- R: When you say you "learn a letter", what do you do? Choose a letter here and give me an idea of how you teach that letter.
- A: I put them on the carpet and I say we are going to learn the letter C. I write the letter on the board, nice and big and colour it in (*see Photograph 32*). See, I teach them the sound. A lot of them know the name of the letter, but I say that's fine but today we are going to say /c/ because we are learning English and the sound says /c/. Then they want to know what is the difference between the letter and the sound and I say "Umsindo (sound)". Today we are doing sound, because when we are going learn to write words, we are going to sound it out. We are going to say it and we can't say "A" because it doesn't make a sound.

In contrast, another teacher also focused on teaching letter-sound correspondences, but added that she later taught letter names:

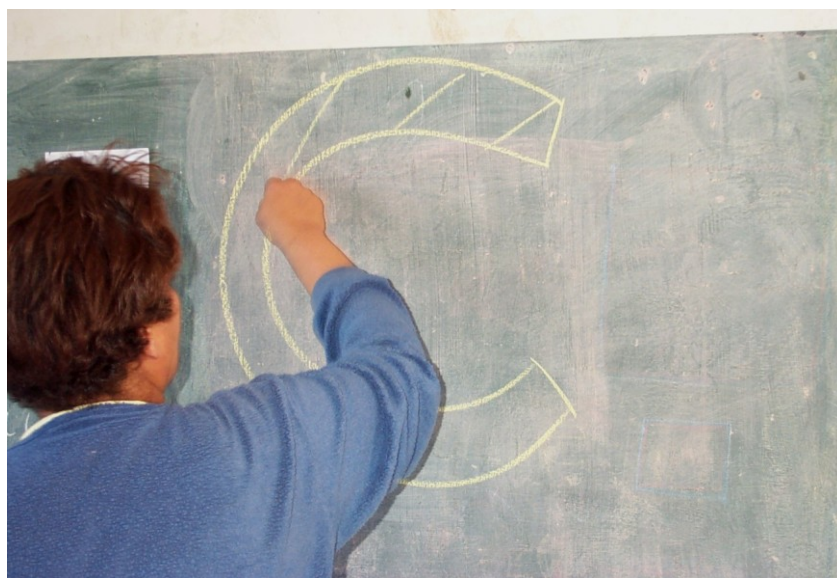
- N: I normally use the alphabet for them to sound. I say, "This is /a/," and then they follow me and they say /a/ and /b/. It helps my learners to differentiate between the sounds. At the beginning of the year, I tell them the sound. Once they have mastered the sound I have to go back, because some of them know the alphabet from Grade R. They say, "This is not /a/, mam, this is A," because they used to sing "A, B, C," like that. So when they come to Grade 1 I have to change that.

The third teacher, however, reported that she had been instructed by the Head of Foundation Phase at the school that this was no longer the accepted way of teaching:

- G: We are not allowed to teach the sound any more. This is the old method and it is not allowed, though I do not agree. The new method emphasises teaching as a class. It is very bad that we do not do "ba, be, bi, bo, bu," now. We are not free now. We cannot assist the child the way we like to. We are bound....In English we must do actions and whole word learning, not sounding out....In English they can read through the pictures. They can't do that in Zulu. They have to understand the sounds.



Photograph 31: Our Sound Tree (A)



Photograph 32: "I write the letter on the board and I colour it in" (A)

Ms G.'s reference to "ba, be, bi, bo, bu," refers to a widely used method of teaching early reading skills in African languages such as isiZulu. Children are first taught the vowels. Then they combine the vowels with consonants to form syllables which are practiced in the format of "ba, be, bi, bo, bu," and commonly written in a substitution table. Then they learn to combine syllables from the table to make words. It is interesting to note that in 2010 when Mthembu JPS reverted to teaching through the medium of isiZulu, this was the method of teaching reading which was adopted.

My own experience of working with these children illustrated the effects of different approaches to learning letter-sound correspondences. I noted on numerous occasions during my read-aloud activities, that many children in Ms G.'s class were unable to say a sound associated with a certain letter, and were shy to attempt to spell words using sounds, seeming uncertain as to what was expected of them. Children from Ms A. and Ms N.'s classes, however, were able to attempt to "sound out" the titles of books, for example.

I reported in Section 5.3.6 on observations about the use of English and isiZulu in this case. In interviews following these observations, teachers were asked to discuss the use of the bilingual texts (specifically the bilingual alphabet friezes) in their rooms. One teacher said that this was only used after the middle of the year although it had been displayed in the classroom from the start of the year:

N: This one [bilingual alphabet chart] I use after they have all the sounds. Then I ask them, /a/ is for apple, what is an apple in Zulu, and they say i-aphula, and then they know. We are trying to use English this year. This is our first time to teach in English. So we put the English name and then the Zulu. For them they have to master the English name, and then they have to look at the Zulu name. For the English name they have to write it without copying from the board. For the Zulu name they can copy it.

Ms N. did not pick up on the fact that the /a/ sound is different in "apple" and "i-aphula." This, and the fact that the initial sounds of the isiZulu nouns used on the bilingual chart do not always match the sounds of the letters they are supposed to represent (for example H for hand and isandla, or E for elephant and ndlovu) is potentially confusing for learners, as discussed in section 5.3.6, but not of major concern to the teachers. Neither was the fact that in English there are various ways to write the same sound and the same letter can represent different sounds. Ms A. brushed this problem aside saying:

- A: I am fortunate in that in Grade 1 we are dealing with very simple syllables and simple sounds and simple words. Fair enough, English is very difficult. For example the kicking /k/ and the curly /c/, it's still the same, it's still a /c/.

Letter formation was taught at the same time as sounds were taught. This was done in a multisensory fashion, as illustrated to a certain extent in Vignette 2 and in the following quote:

- A: Then they draw the sound, they write it, they do it on their little boards, they do it with A: plasticine and then we go outside with the chalk and they write it outside. And then I took cardboard and I said to them they must draw big ones on the cardboard and cut it out. Again, the skill of cutting also helps with writing.

Teaching at the word level

I will report here on four aspects of word level work which were revealed in the interviews. First, in the interviews I asked teachers to comment on one of the remarkable features of the classrooms which I observed in this study, namely the fact that children seldom spoke to the teacher in full sentences, tending rather to use one word at a time. Teachers did not regard this as an immediate problem, but hoped that children would increasingly be able to use full sentences in English as the year progressed, as illustrated in the following extract:

- R: I notice children like to answer you with one word. When you ask them what is happening in this picture, they just say "fruit." But I also notice that when I look in the classroom I see lots of single words, not sentences. Do you think the two observations are related?
- A: I feel that at the moment they haven't reached that stage of full sentences yet, which means that I should be preparing sentences on the board by next term. They are reading the sentences in the exercises, but they are not writing them. That's what's worrying me. Maybe I should start to put, as you say, sentences.

Second, the interviews confirmed observations that teachers showed little awareness of the importance of either concepts of print or metalinguage. This is illustrated in the following extract, in which the teacher confuses syllables and words.

- R: Do you ever show them what a word is, like this? (*Cups hand around each word in the sentence "Today is Wednesday"*)
- A: I don't do that, I normally just show them "Today is Wednesday" (*Points once under each word, does not run finger left to right*). They are learning by inferences that this is a word, and this is how you read. I say,

“Today is Wednesday.” You show them the syllables as well. Three. There must be three different words. Because they don’t know what words and letters are when they come to us.

Third, the teaching of “sight words” by teacher A was clarified in an interview. It has already been reported Ms A. used flash cards to teach children to recognise words by sight, using both regular and irregular, common and less common words as “sight words.” Ms A. explained her approach to choosing words for sight-reading flash cards in the following way:

A: We do use sight words – a lot of the words that I put on the Word Wall are my sight words. Like I said, I was beginning to get frustrated. I don’t have anything in terms of what Grade 1 learners should know.

Finally, it was clear from the interviews that although teachers seldom read stories to learners, they did tell stories, and used these stories as a basis for word level work. As indicated above, two of the teachers had displays of words written on colourful cards in their rooms. They referred to these as their “Word Walls” (Photograph 8 b). One of the teachers explained that:

N: The Word Wall is for stories. These are story words, they come from the story. These are the words they have to master from the story. I write the word and I put it there. We are doing the story of a tortoise. So I have to show them the word tortoise. I write the word and I put it here. All the words that they learn. They are the ones who are telling me, “I heard about tortoise, I heard about elephant, I heard about caterpillar” and I have to write the words here. So it is linked to a story.

Teaching at the extended text level

In the post-lesson observation interviews, all three teachers focused on the lack of access to appropriate books and how this affected their teaching.

In the interviews, teachers were aware of the fact that they “do not have the right materials” for teaching Literacy, for example:

N: We only have Zulu books, but we don’t use these Zulu books. I was teaching in a farm school, where we taught English. They had the material. Here we don’t have any material. We are just doing anything we think is correct. Here we don’t have books. We are not doing the right thing for our learners. We need books.

The teachers' solution to the lack of materials in the classrooms was to make some books themselves rather than to bring books from the library into the classroom or to use Zulu language books. Teachers felt that they were expected to make such resources (N.). However, in most cases these books were made available for use only by the achieving few, confirming the observation that reading books was treated as a reward for fast work. This was explained thus by a teacher:

- N: These are the books I have for them to read when they have finished their work (Shows four large format trade books and one locally-made Big Book). Once they have finished their work they can take the book and sit down and read.

For the purposes of shared reading, teachers created their own extended texts on chart paper or the chalkboard. Three examples of these have already been described. In one other case, in contrast with any observations, a teacher explained that she had used a small homemade book (see Photograph 33) for teaching purposes with the whole class.

- A: I made this book. Each child got a book. I made it on the computer because we didn't have any books. I flash the words to them on flash cards, and I had the words on a big chart as well. Then each page I ask them to look at the pictures and then read the sentence. Maybe two sentences a day. Some of them can read it and some can't. Then I send the book home and I say read the sentence at home. So they HAVE to touch the book, they have to read it; they have to turn the pages. And then as we go over the different words, they are allowed to take the book home and read from this page to that page wherever the words are. So it wasn't like they took the book home and they read the whole book, no, they had to read the pages where we had prepared the words first.

This extract offers a fleeting glimpse of the use of a positive classroom and homework procedure, as well as a sense that the teacher understood two valuable aspects of learning to read: the need to physically handle texts in order to gain familiarity with them and the need to practice reading. However, children's independence and initiative in reading was restricted by the instruction to read only the pages which had already been practiced in class.

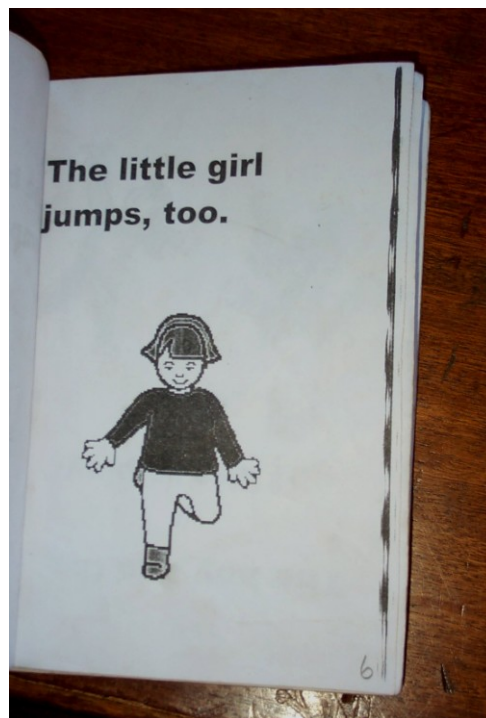
As stated earlier, no guided reading (reading to the teacher) took place in this case. Teachers said that this was because they did not have a reading scheme:

- A: At [Mthembu] we struggle because we don't have a reading scheme as such, for all children to be reading one book at the same time. It is easier to teach them in that manner. Instead of having 40 children reading 40

different books, how do you get to teaching them? You don't. So having no resources is an uphill struggle

This quote indicates a weak understanding of how “reading schemes” are organised into levels and how they are intended to be used to match child to reading level so that the child can read at instructional reading level as described in Chapter 2, with the guidance of the teacher.

Regarding independent reading, teachers were asked what would happen if they gave children 30 minutes every day to read, as per directives from the Education Department. No teachers responded with enthusiasm to the idea. One amused response was: “Chaos!” (N).



Photograph 33: Inside the locally made book “Boy and girl”(A)

How teachers themselves were taught to read

Hypothesising that the way teachers teach at present is influenced by the way they themselves learned to read, I asked the teachers to remember how they learned to read. Ms N. and Ms G. learned to read in isiZulu, and Ms A. in English. All three teachers spoke fondly of learning to read, but two of them were somewhat vague about how the approach by which they had learned:

- N: I learned to read at home. My sister taught me when I was 9 years. I was at school already. At school we were just singing. I didn't hate it because I didn't know different.
- A: I don't teach completely in the way I learned. I was influenced terribly by a teacher of mine. She was an avid reader. Her basic influence on people was to leave school able to read. She taught me in Grade 2 and Grade 4, and when I came out as a teacher she was one of my colleagues as well. She helped me to deal with basic methods of teaching literacy. She was forward looking as a teacher in those days.

The third teacher was more precise about how she had been taught to read, and as was reported earlier, felt that this was still the most appropriate method to use now. The method she referred to is still widely used in teaching reading in isiZulu. As briefly described earlier, it involves synthetic phonics focusing on joining syllables together to make words using substitution tables. However, as reported above, she interpreted the current policy of the school and the Department of Education as disallowing this approach.

- G: I learned the old way with “ba, be, bi, bo, bu; ma me, me mo, mu; la, le li, lo, lu.” That was the good way to learn.

Throughout this dissertation it can be seen that Ms G. firmly believes in teaching sounds, and that this can be traced back to both how she herself learned to read and to her initial teacher training.

Teachers' opinions of formal teacher education courses

All teachers in this case study did their initial teacher training prior to the introduction of the single national curriculum, C2005, and the NCS. They had to develop an understanding of teaching the NCS on the job, but anyway none felt that they had been adequately prepared to teach reading in their initial teacher training.

- N: The method they were using when I studied was the same that they were using when I was young. But when I went out for teaching everything changed with this thing of OBE [Outcomes Based Education]. They didn't teach us about that at college. I had to learn this new way of doing things.

All three teachers had initially completed three year teacher training certificates to qualify as teachers, and only Ms N. was specifically trained to teach in the Foundation Phase of schooling. For the other teachers, who trained as junior school teachers, the structure of the initial teacher education programmes required specialisation in a “school subject” and

although they did study how to teach reading, this was not the major focus of their teacher training programme. For example, one teacher specialised in teaching needlework and clothing at college, and her memories of learning to teach reading were thus:

- A: I wasn't exposed to teaching reading. When I came out I had to teach a class. When I started teaching I had to read up what was expected of me by the Department of Education, and by talking to colleagues and getting a mentor to come in and guide me.

Teachers were asked whether any particular approach to teaching reading had been favoured in their initial training, or whether they had been trained to use any particular reading programme. Responses were varied:

- N: Some of them [college lecturers] just gave us a lot of things [to choose from] and some of them gave us step by step.
- A: They didn't expose us [to teaching reading], but for teaching prac. They were prescriptive in that they gave us prepared schemes and you had to work from the schemes. They gave us your phonics and this is what you had to cover. If it was the Beehive series they said, "These are the words you must give the kids," and your reading cards were made out. And spelling, and oral as well, they gave you topics, that you had to follow exactly.
- G: They taught us the old method of the sounds.

The teachers in this case had limited recollection of what they were taught in their initial teacher training. This is not unexpected or unusual considering the time lapse since studying. However the fact that none of the teachers had a coherent set of beliefs about teaching reading, as will be shown in Section 5.4, calls into question the depth and quality of this training.

When C2005 and the NCS were introduced, these teachers attended between one and five continuing teacher development courses organised by the Department of Education, but they did not feel that these courses had been very helpful.

- N: The department just organised workshops without knowing what is happening in the classrooms. They never been in the class before. They don't know what the conditions are.

Teachers in this case felt that they were receiving too little support and guidance regarding teaching reading from the Department of Education. They reported that:

- A: We muddle along, finding what works and what does not work as we go. The department is not prescriptive. They don't tell us you must do the reading like this. A lot of us feel there was a lot of good from the old methods. When the OBE came in we embraced it. When they said, "Look children don't learn in isolation, you can't learn letters only or words only, you have to work with sentences," we embraced all this and tried to work out what was best for us.

(Note the contradiction between this teacher's words and my finding that most work in these classrooms happens at the letter and word level.)

Teachers learn a lot of their craft on the job, and finding a role model who had the patience to share her practice and knowledge was an important factor for both Ms N. and Ms A. as they started teaching literacy.

- A: That lady was my mentor. She came in and gave me a demonstration of how reading should be taught. So I learned a lot from some colleagues.

- N: I had a mentor who was working at a private school, she helped me.

Two of the teachers in this study had recently studied formal courses in Adult Basic Education (ABET). I hypothesised that these courses would have taught them things about how people learn to read which they could apply in their Grade 1 classrooms. I found, however, that neither teacher could remember much at all about these adult education courses and were unable to articulate any way in which their literacy teaching practice had been affected by these courses. Ms A., who had been forced by timetabling constraints to do a module in ABET in her B.Ed (Hons) at UKZN, thought that they had learned about top-down and bottom up approaches to teaching reading in that course, but that which approach was used depended on the individual teacher:

- A: Again it is the method that the teacher chooses. I may be strong on phonics and then I teach in the phonetic way. But another person may decide to teach in the top-down way.

Ms N. did UNISA's ABET Certificate course because at that time it was possible for school teachers to "double park" or work in an ABET centre at night. She could not remember learning anything about teaching people to read in that course. Her dominant memory of the course was:

- N: I think the most important thing they were emphasizing was helping those who are not working, how you can convince them to get job opportunities. It was more like community development.

When asked whether they had learned anything in their ABET courses which was useful to them in their jobs teaching Grade 1 children, Ms N. answered with a flat and emphatic, "No!" After some thought, Ms A. agreed that her ABET course had not helped her in terms of teaching literacy, but then tentatively offered:

- A: Perhaps I did get something out of it, realizing that everyone is educable. If you think of our children's parents. Just imagine if I was able to help them, it would take a burden off me. So in a way it impacts indirectly. It helps you to understand where the parents are coming from.

ABET courses taken by school teachers potentially provide a great opportunity for practical and theoretical development of skills in the teaching of reading in schools. Those who teach ABET teachers should, I believe, carefully consider their curriculum for how it could contribute to reducing adult illiteracy by simultaneously teaching teachers how to teach adults **and** children to read. This would be a very valuable line of research. On the other hand, Bartlett (2007) shows how the educational project in school literacy classrooms can actually *compete* with the projects of many adult literacy classes. Bartlett's research in Brazil showed how both the general educational approach and the literacy pedagogy (both in words and in action) of school teachers from vastly different biographical, geographical and professional backgrounds was essentially conservative regarding the purpose of schooling and of literacy. In contrast, adult literacy often embodies a broader social justice/popular education project and a more ideological view of the purpose of schooling and literacy. The experiences of Ms N. in studying ABET are an example of this. These two educational projects "vie for control of adult educational programmes, pedagogies and resources in Brazil" (Bartlett, 2007, p.163) and the "dominant educational project must accommodate, permeate or surmount rival educational projects to maintain hegemony". I would argue that this is another reason for the teachers of Adult Educators and the teachers of early literacy educators to engage in dialogue with one another.

Thus, for the teachers in this case, neither their initial teacher education nor their continuing teacher education had focused on what are now considered key components of literacy teaching: teaching reading for meaning, phonemic awareness, concepts of print, fluency,

comprehension strategies, emergent literacy, development of reading and writing in children, literacy-rich environments, the importance of play, teaching second language learners and so on. The education system has thus failed them, and the consequence is that the system is now also failing their students.

5.3.9 Evidence from children's drawings of their literacy classes

Two out of the three teachers returned drawings done by children showing their Literacy classes. The two sets of pictures were quite different from each other but consistent within themselves. This could either be interpreted as showing that the children in each class experienced learning literacy in the same way as their classmates and that the teachers emphasised different aspects of literacy learning, or, the interpretation which I believe is more likely, that the teachers must have made some suggestions to the learners as to what they should draw. I do not believe that this interpretation makes the drawings inadmissible data – the fact that the learners probably drew what the teachers had suggested they draw shows interesting aspects of what the teachers themselves considered important in their work.

For the purposes of this analysis I was interested in what texts were represented in the children's drawings and in what people in the pictures were doing.

Texts represented

In Ms N.'s class, most children drew a variety of activities, including alphabets, word lists, numbers and sums. In Ms A's class few children illustrated numbers and sums, whereas a large number of Ms N.'s included numeracy-related texts. This is in keeping with her assertion, reported earlier, that there are not strong boundaries between Learning Areas in the Foundation Phase and that the names of numbers can be used to learn reading. The difference between the two classes' drawings is demonstrated by Drawings 1(a) and (b). ⁸

⁸ In order to protect their identities, children's names have been removed from all the drawings reproduced in this dissertation.



Drawing 1 (a)



Drawing 1 (b)

Drawings 1(a) and (b): Typical differences between children's drawings from (a) Class N. and (b) Class A.

Table 6 categorises the texts drawn by children according to the level of text. It shows that the majority of children in both classes drew word lists, usually with associated pictures. Far fewer children represented the alphabet (letter level) and sentences.

Table 6: Content of texts represented in children's drawings

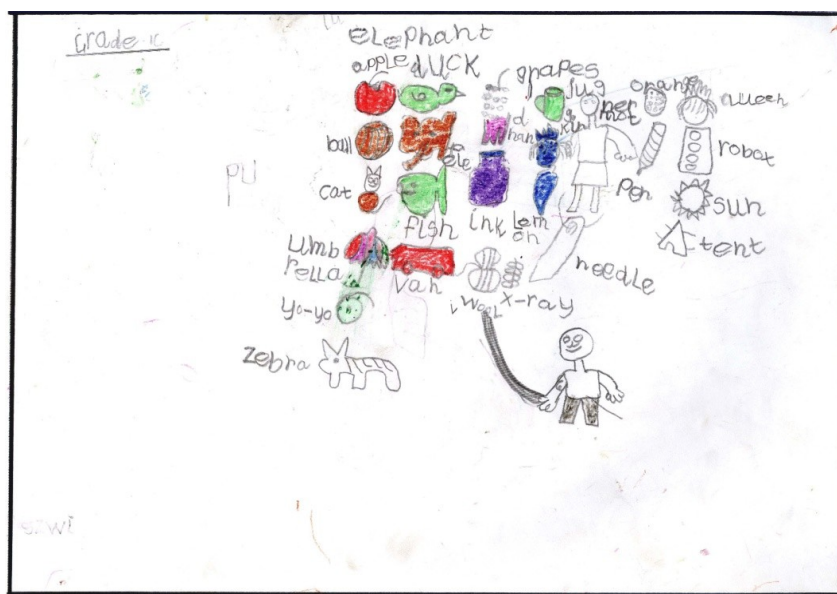
Content	Class of Ms A.	Class of Ms N.
Letter Level		
Alphabet (lower case only)	2	1
Alphabet (upper case only)	2	3
Alphabet (upper and lower case)	1	7
TOTAL	5	11
Word level		
List of words from alphabet charts in the room, in roughly alphabetical order (no pictures)	9	3
List of words from alphabet charts in the room, in roughly alphabetical order (with pictures)	20	10
Series of pictures from alphabet charts in the room (with no associated writing)	1	4
Lists of words linked by a common spelling pattern (e.g. double-O words)	2 (an and am)	3 (oo)
Lists of words semantically linked (e.g. days of week or months of year)	3	7
List of words from a story	0	1
TOTAL	59	28
Sentence level		
Sentences beginning "I like"	5	10
Sentences without the "I like" structure (e.g. "the moon is big"; "the car is red"; "my name is ...")	2	7
TOTAL	7	17
Numbers and sums		
Drawings with no numeracy-related representation	29	5
Includes numbers and or sums	6	20
Includes numbers and their written names	1	7
TOTAL	7	27

An example of an alphabet from a child in Ms A.'s class is found in Drawing 2.



Drawing 2: Alphabet with letters and pictures (Class A)

It was clear that all the lists of words in the children's drawings were copied from the walls of the classroom. With the exception of one drawing, all words listed in the drawings were visible on the classroom walls. In Drawing 6, by a child in Ms N's classroom, some additional words were listed, but this was the only drawing in the entire set in which this was done. In addition, the letter A was uniformly associated with apple, B with ball, O with orange and so on. This can be seen, for example by comparing Drawing 1 with Drawing 3, below.



Drawing 3: Word list in alphabetical order (Class A)

In two cases in Ms A.'s class, children listed words according to their rime or word family, as in Drawing 4. The word list in Drawing 4 is copied from a poster reproduced earlier in Photograph 7.

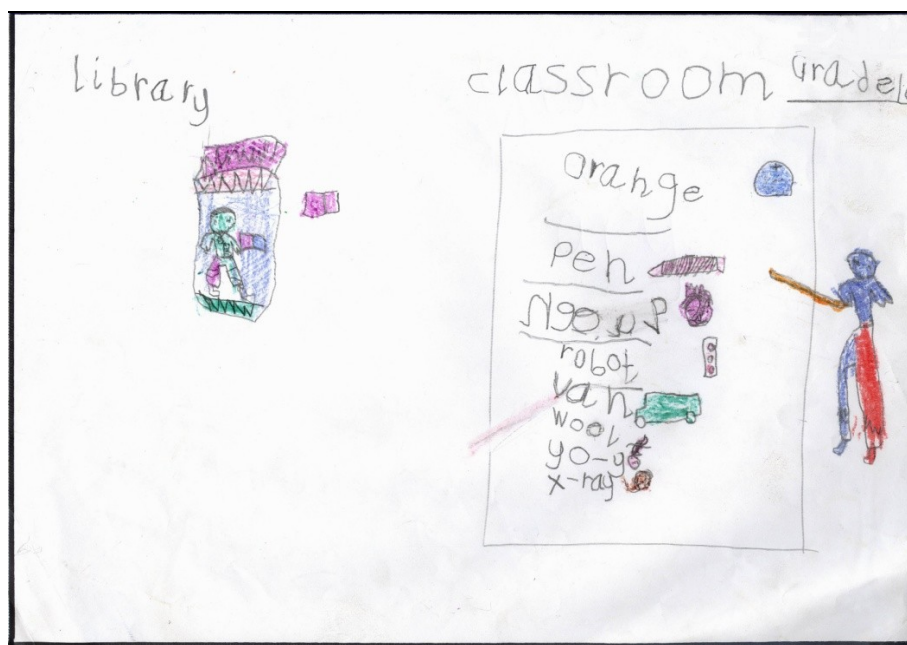


Drawing 4: Word list with common rime (Class A)

In only a very few instances did children make reference to books in either pictures or stories. All those who did so were from Ms N.'s class, which is contrary to what might have been

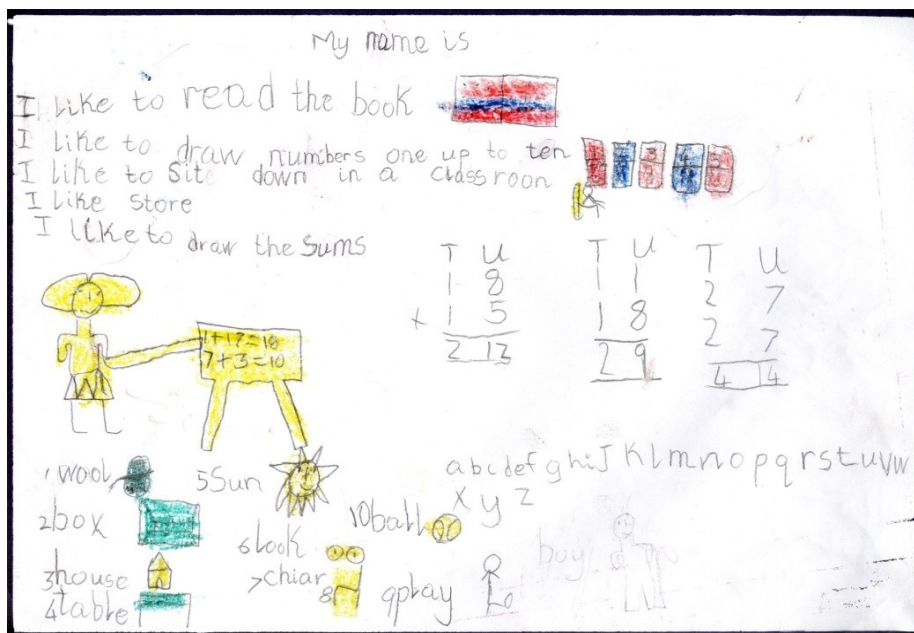
expected considering the relatively greater number of books present in Ms A.'s room. However, the only child who represented the library and the classroom came from Ms A's class. In the classroom someone pointed at a list of words, but in the library, someone held a book (Drawing 5).

Nine children's drawings featured simple sentences, the majority of which were variations of the structure "*I like...*" Other sentences were, "*the moon is big*", "*the tree is green*" and "*my name is...*" All the sentences which began with "*I*" began with a capital letter, but none of the other sentences did. No children used full stops at the end of their sentences. This is not surprising considering the lack of teacher attention to punctuation already reported. Two children, clearly the most advanced writers in Ms N.'s class, wrote a number of slightly more complex sentences about things they liked doing in the class (see Drawing 6). Both these children wrote that they liked books and one wrote that he liked stories.

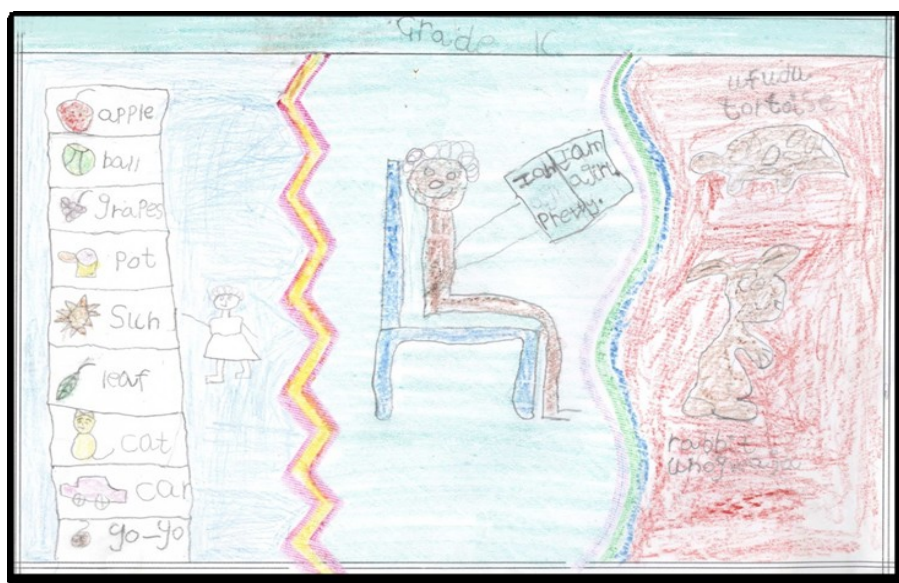


Drawing 5: The library and the classroom (Class A)

One child (Drawing 7) illustrated the words and pictures from the story of the tortoise and the hare. Note how similar this is to the teacher-made chart in Photograph 9 reproduced earlier. This again demonstrates how children habitually (in this exercise and throughout the year) copy texts from the walls of the classrooms.



Drawing 6: Sentences (Class N)



Drawing 7: Reference to the tortoise and rabbit story (right) (Class A)

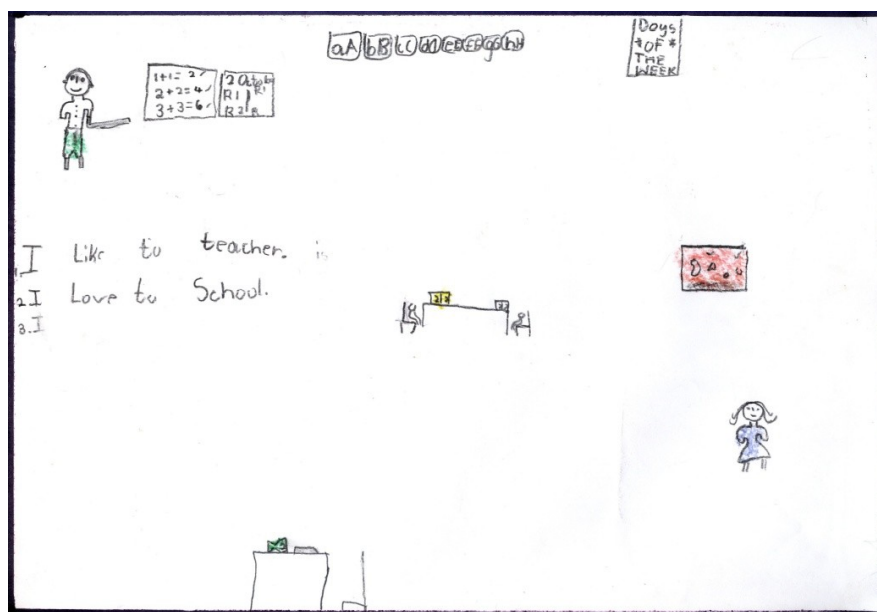
Agency

All the drawings which have been shown above include people doing things in the classrooms. In Ms N.'s class, 2 out of 34 children did not draw any people in their pictures. 8 represented one person and 24 drew two or more people. In the illustrations containing 2 or more people, nine drew one person standing and at least one sitting. Drawing 7 above was an exception among these drawings – it was the only one out of 24 in which the person standing

was not considerably larger than the person sitting. Children would need to be interviewed in order to determine with accuracy who was being represented in these drawings, but it is reasonable to surmise that the big, standing, person with detailed female clothing and elaborate hairstyles was the teacher.

In contrast, the people sitting on chairs were drawn without clothing, without colour, without facial features, comparatively small (sometimes really tiny), and except in Drawing 7, without hair. 13 other drawings showed more than one person (most often two people) standing, and these people were represented in roughly similar size and detail. In two cases it was possible to discern that at least one of the people represented was wearing trousers (since Ms N. sometimes wore trousers to school it should not be assumed that this person was the child, although both the children who drew such people were boys).

11 of the pictures showed a person pointing at texts with a stick. None of the pictures with only one person represented fell into this group. In 6 (just over half) of the pictures where someone was pointing, the person was pointing to numbers or sums, and in 5 to lists of words. In the latter group, all but one were pointing to English words, and in all but one the words were illustrated, in similar fashion to the alphabet charts or word lists encountered in the classroom. These unillustrated words were the only example of isiZulu words in any of the drawings collected.



Drawing 8: Teacher standing with stick, children seated (Class N)

In Ms A.'s class, 36 children did the drawing. Of these, 6 did not represent any people in their pictures. Of the drawings with people, 15 drew only one person. 11 of these were pointing at lists of words with a stick, one drew a person sitting on a chair holding a pen, and in three drawings it was not clear what the person was doing. The children in Ms A.'s class did not pay as much detailed attention to the clothes and hairstyles of the people they drew as in the case of Ms N.'s class, and it is not as easy to work out whether the children were representing themselves or the teacher pointing at words. Both could be possible, as observations showed. Of the 14 drawings in which more than one person was represented, 10 showed someone pointing at a list of words.

The drawings done by Ms A.'s class seemed a lot less mature and polished than those done by Ms N.'s class. People were drawn with less detail, colouring in was more haphazard and there were a greater number of drawings of an extremely undeveloped nature on which the teacher had had to write the child's name (as explained above the teacher did this if the child was not yet able to write his or her name independently). The relative size of people shown in these pictures was much less markedly different than in the case of Ms N.'s class. These differences may relate to different developmental abilities of children in the two classes, though there the teachers gave no indication that the classes had different populations in terms of ability. If my suspicion that the teachers directed their classes in how to draw their pictures is correct, then it is also possible that these differences were a result of less detailed scaffolding by Ms A. than by Ms N.

A more detailed analysis of the children's drawings would yield very rich data about children's perspectives of the learning and teaching context. However, as my rationale for including the children's drawings as a data collection method was more to facilitate triangulation of teacher-generated data than to engage in deep analysis of children's experiences and thoughts, this analysis will have to wait for another forum.

In summary, the children's representations of their Literacy classrooms confirmed the dominance of their work with lists of single words when learning reading, and, with the exception of one drawing which showed a child in the library, confirmed that teaching reading involved someone (teacher or child) pointing at such lists with a stick. The corollary of this, chanting of words by the whole class, could not be discerned from the children's drawings. The children's drawings reflect almost no use of books in the teaching of reading.

From the perspective of theory of reading, these findings point to the use of a bottom-up approach to teaching reading. This is in accordance with findings and analysis of data from classroom observations and analysis of the texts on the walls by both teachers and myself.

5.3.10 Synthesis: How these teachers teach reading

In this section I begin by listing the statements I constructed in the process of data analysis to describe what teachers in this case did when teaching reading. Then I discuss five aspects in further detail

Analytical statements

- The three Grade 1 teachers in the school follow common lesson plans each day.
- Pedagogical leadership in middle management in the school is weak.
- Most reading instruction relates to reading English, with a lesser proportion of time devoted to reading isiZulu.
- Reading in English and isiZulu is taught in roughly the same way.
- No reading text books or readers are present in this case. While some “library books” are present they are seldom attractive or interesting and are not integrated into instruction.
- Recitation of the alphabet occurs daily throughout Grade 1.
- Children are first introduced to the letters and a corresponding sound and simultaneously taught to form (write) the letter.
- Letter formation is practiced in a multisensory fashion to a certain extent.
- Alphabet friezes are used to train children to associate an English word with its initial sound.
- Later in the year, some digraphs are introduced.
- Children are taught to read words by sounding out their individual letters.
- Blending of sounds into words is not consistently or explicitly modelled.
- Sight words are taught by only one teacher, using flash-card drill, but she has no clear strategy for choosing words for sight word reading and does not teach a method for recognising words by sight.
- Flash cards are not routinely used to practice specific phonic principles.

- Lists of words exhibiting a particular spelling or sound pattern are presented and drilled by the whole class in chorus, following the lead of the teacher or a chosen learner.
- Inconsistencies in English letter-sound correspondence are ignored.
- Words which have been drilled in chorus are later inserted into simple sentences and the sentences are read aloud in whole-class chorus.
- Rebus sentences are regularly used for writing exercises to practice words previously presented in lists.
- The meaningful communicative function of sentences presented is limited or non-existent, so students do not have a clear purpose for reading.
- Lists of words or sentences are regularly copied by children.
- Extended (multi-sentence) texts are used irregularly.
- Extended texts are locally made and often do not model good paragraph structure. Limited use is made of Language Experience texts.
- Individual words in extended texts are drilled in whole-class chorus.
- Extended texts are read, sentence by sentence, by the whole class in chorus.
- Stories are seldom read aloud or told to the children.
- Little differentiation of tasks takes place to accommodate learner diversity.
- Guided and independent practice of reading is not a feature in this case.
- Children who complete work early are the only ones who get to look at books in the classroom.
- The only word-attack strategy which is modelled or used is the use of phonic cues.
- Comprehension instruction focuses on the translation and understanding of individual words.
- Fluency in reading, including reading speed are not a focus.
- Phonemic awareness is not a focus of teaching

Language

Because of school language policy, the skills and process of reading were taught largely through the medium of English (the children's second language), but also through isiZulu (their mother tongue). There appeared to be little difference between the methods employed

to teach reading in these languages. The phonic differences between the languages received no attention.

Theoretical orientation

Data from the transect walk, observations, interviews and children's drawings all support the key finding that in this case the major focus of reading literacy instruction was on word- and sub-word level work. The focus of teaching was on the use of synthetic phonics to read individual, isolated words, though some sight word recognition was expected, and one teacher was observed using an analytic phonics approach. In terms of the theoretical orientations to reading outlined in Chapter 2, reading in this case was taught in a manner consistent with a "bottom-up" theoretical orientation. This assessment is further corroborated by the fact that children encountered limited extended and coherent text which was purposeful, functional and interesting. Where such text was encountered, language use was sometimes stilted and limited, and often determined by the grapheme or phoneme item being practiced. In addition, patterns of classroom interaction were limited to whole-class teaching, with a dominance of whole-class drill, led by the teacher or learners. Diversity of learners' reading proficiency was catered for in some, but not all the classes, taking the form of privileges for high achievers, such as being able to play games or look at library books when classwork had been completed. In general, learners were communalized and instructional knowledge undifferentiated. The foregoing are entirely contrary to a whole language or a balanced approach to teaching reading.

In Chapter 2 the theoretical position of a balanced reading programme was discussed. Teachers in this case study were not clear what a balanced approach to early literacy means, despite the fact that this is the official position of the National Curriculum (South Africa. National Department of Education, 2003b), as discussed in Chapter 3. Two teachers said that they had "never heard of it" and one thought she had heard of it, but had no declarative knowledge of what it might mean. Their classroom practice bore out this lack of understanding.

Meaning was a focus of teaching in the sense that there was an emphasis on the translation of words from isiZulu to English as learners acquired vocabulary in a new language, but the dominant though silent message sent out to learners is that sounding out words is the way to

access them and that one can read by pronouncing words without necessarily understanding their meaning.

Although children were also taught to read isiZulu words, most reading instruction took place in English (the additional language). The learning of reading was conflated with the acquisition of vocabulary in the additional language, namely English. They were not being taught oral English in a communicative way either. As beginning English learners, the children could not draw on their knowledge of vocabulary, language structure or social functions of language as they learned to read. This tended to limit their reading to words which had been officially “taught” (in other words, translated into/from isiZulu and the spelling, sounds or letters focused on by the teacher) as well as limiting their learning of and use of other cuing systems in the reading process. One implication of this was that children’s background or contextual knowledge which, as argued in Chapter 2, is key in comprehension (particularly inferential comprehension), was not developed at a great rate in this case. The extracts from the lesson about healthy food underline this point.

Sequencing and pacing

At the start of the school year, teachers focused on letters and sounds out of the context of words. This occurred simultaneously in a number of ways. The alphabet sequence was recited by rote (this practice continued routinely throughout the year) and at the same time, the shape and sound of individual letters was taught. There was no common approach among the teachers in this case regarding the sequence in which letters were taught, the logic for this sequence, or whether the focus was on letter names, sounds or both. Children were taught letter formation as they learned to recognise them and their sounds. To a certain extent this was done in a multisensory fashion through writing in different media. As letters were introduced, one common sound associated with the letter in English was taught, but other possible variations of sound were not dealt with. Through the use of alphabet friezes, the initial intention of reading instruction was to get children to associate a particular English word with each letter according to the initial letter of the word.

After the letters and sounds had been introduced, reading of words was taught largely through synthetic phonics, though one teacher used a more analytic phonics approach and one teacher

also taught sight (whole) words. Children learned to sound the letters in each word and were expected to string these sounds together although few examples were seen of teachers demonstrating how to do this. There was a dominant emphasis on using graphophonic clues to decipher words, and little attention was paid to other word-recognition strategies. Teachers expected learners to be able to “sound out” and read lists of words by the end of Grade 1, and “perhaps” to be able to read a short sentence independently. They did not emphasise either reading for meaning or reading for enjoyment in describing their expectations of learners. Words were typically introduced either in relation to a common spelling pattern (in other words not semantically linked) or in relation to a theme (in other words, semantically linked). Although a large proportion of the texts on the classroom walls were lists of words, pedagogy usually involved the teacher or children “putting the words into sentences” either orally or in writing. Generally such sentences were restricted in structure, function and meaning. The use of rebus sentences was widespread. Learners copied text from the board, and filled in missing words or letters, and in some cases substituted their own words into a formulaic sentence such as “*I like...*” However they were not taught or expected to write their own ideas at this grade level: in other words real writing was not expected.

Early literacy development

The data indicates that in this case teachers paid scant attention to the development of phonemic awareness skills, despite the fact that recitation of rhymes is a daily occurrence in the classrooms and despite the emphasis of the Department of Education. The only example seen of children being asked to manipulate sounds in words was in an isiZulu lesson. The teacher did not understand this as developing phonemic awareness, but rather as using “the old method” of teaching reading. As was shown in Chapter 2, research is clear that it is beneficial to early literacy learners to be able to manipulate sounds and to be aware of sounds, syllables and rhythms in words. Meaning is not essential in developing this kind of awareness. Therefore, if learners are not proficient in English it should not make a difference to their ability to play with sounds. However, it would be most logical and efficient for learners to develop phonemic awareness in their mother tongue.

Phonemic awareness is an oral skill. Classroom management styles play an important role in determining the quality of oral communication in a classroom. At Mthembu JPS and in many of the schools in my preliminary study it was common for a number of children to “shout

out” answers or to clamour for attention with flicking fingers and waving hands. Although it is positive that learners had this level of enthusiasm, this is not an environment conducive to the development of oral skills, including listening skills and phonemic awareness.

While teachers in this case emphasised “learning the alphabet,” literature about early literacy learning emphasises the importance of the Alphabetic Principle, which is an understanding that there is a relationship between the sounds and the letters that represent them (Adams, 1990) and an understanding that written words are made up of letters that represent speech. I would argue that while the learners in this case study certainly did develop knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, they were not helped sufficiently to understand how speech and writing are linked. This links to the discussion of concepts of print which I deal with next.

Teachers also paid scant attention to the development of concepts about print in these classrooms, in spite of the literacy-poor backgrounds from which most learners come. Using the language of “reading readiness” rather than of “emergent literacy”, they showed a weak understanding of the development of reading and writing in children, for example seeing “pretend reading” and “scribbling” as problems rather than part of literacy development. Teachers knew that children come from print-poor backgrounds and responded to this by putting up plenty of posters in their classrooms. However, they did not make use of children’s experience with environmental print such as ubiquitous commercial logos to develop children’s understanding of print. Similarly, they provided very little contact with books, seldom read stories aloud, controlled children’s writing and drawing outputs in such a way that restricted children’s experimentation with print, and did not consciously develop phonemic awareness. There was widespread use of recitation/chanting/singing rhymes in English, but teachers did not consciously help learners to develop the ability to manipulate and play with sounds. Rather, rhymes were routinely recited as a classroom management strategy to signal that the teacher wanted the class to settle down.

Teaching reading for meaning

In general, teachers in this case did not teach reading for meaning. I will justify this statement in this section in the light of six components of teaching reading for meaning which were outlined in Chapter 2, namely, comprehension instruction, development of vocabulary and background knowledge, fluency development, literacy-rich environments, metalinguistic

awareness and establishing reading and writing connections. In addition, the practice of teaching sounds and words without attention to constructing meaning at the whole text level contributes to the difficulties that students experience with understanding what they read.

It was argued in Chapter 2 that it is important to focus on comprehension right from emergent reading stages. In this way, children come to expect that reading involves understanding the meaning of texts. Nation and Angell's work (2006), discussed in Chapter 2, posited that difficulties in comprehension relate first to difficulties with monitoring comprehension, inferencing and appreciating genre and structure of text. Second, comprehension difficulties are related to oral language difficulties such as vocabulary, semantics, figurative language use; and third, they relate to poor working memory which is compounded by learning in a new language. In this case, comprehension of text was not a significant feature of teaching and learning. Teachers did not teach text comprehension skills such as those mentioned above at all, either by demonstrating such skills, talking about them, or offering different levels of support to learners to practice using them. No emphasis was placed on text-to-self connections, or text-to-text or text-to-world connections. The teachers sometimes, but seldom, asked comprehension-type questions such as "When do we eat our eggs?" and they typically answered their own questions immediately as if they did not expect learners to be able to answer.

Teachers and learners in this case focused much of their attention on the development of vocabulary in a new language. Most often new words were introduced according to a sound or spelling pattern, but they were also introduced in relation to stories or themes. Meaning of words was deemed to be covered by translation from or into isiZulu, and the widespread use of rebus sentences ensured the association of new words with a visual representation of these words. Such a strategy works only for concrete nouns and some verbs. Vocabulary can also be developed incidentally through, for example, conversation and being read to. Neither of these strategies was used to a significant extent in this case. There was a lack of opportunity for teacher-child or child-child talk, and a lack of focus on word consciousness. Word learning strategies, such as the use of context clues or parts of words, were not taught at all and opportunities were not created for new vocabulary to be encountered in different contexts over time.

The importance of knowledge development for reading development in general and comprehension in particular was also raised in Chapter 2. In this case limited attention was placed on knowledge development, although multiple opportunities for this existed. Teachers focused on what children already knew (for example, the names of parts of the body or different kinds of food, repeating rhymes, singing songs, colouring in), possibly because they felt they needed to learn the words for what they knew in English, but in general very little extension in terms of content took place in this case. Hoadley (2007, p. 682) and others working in the Bernsteinian tradition argue that in South Africa emphasis on local, everyday knowledge, particularly with marginal groups, paradoxically fails these students by not giving them access to context independent knowledge which enables them to succeed at school.

In Chapter 2 the work of Neuman (2006) was discussed which argues that that children's knowledge base can be increased in schools through thematic instruction, active engagement of the learner's mind, high levels of teacher interaction with children to scaffold their learning, recognizing the importance of children's play in representing and practicing skills and knowledge, and finally helping children to develop competence and self-esteem. In this case, a certain degree of thematic instruction did occur, but as has been shown this generally remained at the level of the known while focusing on vocabulary in a new language. Active engagement of the learners' minds did not, in my judgement occur, save to the degree that they had to struggle to work in a new language. Children's play was not in any way a feature of these classrooms. I shall discuss the issue of teacher's responses to children's reading errors and behaviour shortly, but insofar as such responses were either threatening or undermining, they did not help to build self-esteem or competence in the learners in this case. In sum, children's knowledge base was not developed in this case.

The third way of developing comprehension skill discussed in Chapter 2 is by developing reading speed up to approximately 60 words a minute, accompanied by fluency. It was argued that this is necessary because of the limitations of short-term memory. Teachers in this case paid no attention whatsoever to reading speed, and when they engaged in shared reading with their classes, led the reading in a sing-song rather than fluent manner. It is probable that children's status as English language learners contributed to this situation.

Fourth, comprehension is, as set out in Chapter 2, enhanced by a literacy-rich environment in which learners use reading and writing to learn about themselves and the world. It was pointed out that a positive effect on reading development is experienced when a range of texts are available and reading is actually done in the environment, when the environment facilitates contact with paper and pencil and when adults respond to what children are trying to do with literacy. As has been discussed already, most text encountered by children in this case was words in lists. There was an extremely limited range of text genres, and very little quality fiction was present in the classrooms in this case and even less informational text. Literacy-rich environments should help to promote a culture of literacy. Two important aspects of this should be the promotion of positive attitudes towards literacy and the developing understanding that literacy is a meaning-full process. There was no evidence in these classroom environments of literacy-related activities being **fun** – no attractive reading books, no literacy play areas, no imaginative and thought-provoking displays were observed, no regular reading of captivating fiction. There were few signs in the classrooms, and none of these stimulated children to use reading or writing. Worksheets were commonly used, but often did not require thought or comprehension to complete. Reading was done in the classrooms under the direction and control of the teachers, who did not provide time or materials for children to read independently or with their guidance, or time and opportunity to talk about texts. Teachers described unskilled writing as scribbling, and children had no independent or guided opportunities to put pen to paper. Children either copied words or sentences written by the teacher, or used a formulaic sentence structure such as “I like...” when writing. Teacher’s response to children’s literacy work was in the main corrective, as will be discussed below.

The fifth aspect of reading instruction which promotes comprehension, discussed in Chapter 2, is metalinguistic awareness. Metalanguage is part of metacognition, or being able to think consciously about one’s own thought processes. In terms of reading, metacognition allows the reader to think about his/her thinking and to monitor his/her comprehension, a characteristic of proficient readers. Research shows that poorer readers tend to focus on decoding and not meaning, and do not realise that they do not understand what they are reading. In this case study there appeared to be poor understanding on the part of teachers of the role they might have to play in helping children develop metalanguage.

The sixth way of promoting comprehension identified in Chapter 2 was to emphasise the connection between reading and writing. Teaching reading and writing together and encouraging the use of phonic knowledge for invented spelling are both valuable for comprehension development, but neither occurred in this case. Children's writing, as has been discussed, was limited to copying words or sentences.

Teachers' response to learners' miscues

Goodman (1965/2003, 1973/2003) and Clay (1969) have emphasised how learners' mistakes should be seen as miscues (using cueing systems incorrectly) rather than errors, and how they provide direction to the teacher regarding where to focus teaching to help the learner to use all cuing systems effectively. In this chapter a number of examples have been given of teachers' responses to mistakes learners make when reading. In all these cases, the teachers responded by immediately correcting the learner, sometimes accompanied by ridicule or threat. More efficient "sounding out" was seen as the solution to most miscues. Corrections did not take into account whether the miscue had any effect on meaning as illustrated by the example of the additional "my" in the healthy food text. On the other hand, when teachers praised learners, they did not make explicit the skill or behaviour they were praising.

5.4 TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TEACHING READING

5.4.1 Introduction

My second and third key research questions were *What are these teacher's beliefs about teaching reading?* and *How do these teachers' beliefs about teaching reading relate to their observed and reported practice?* Data regarding teachers' beliefs was gathered through a modified TORP (Teacher's Orientation to Reading Practice) (de Ford, 1985; Poulson et al., 2001). The modified version of the TORP which I used also involved an opportunity for teachers to report on the reading and writing practices which they regarded as important. This reported practice could then be compared with observed practice.

5.4.2 Results of modified TORP survey

An analysis of the questionnaire results is contained in Table 7 below. Note that the teachers' scores are recorded in a constant order so that the first entry in the scores column always represents the response of the same teacher. The first three theoretical orientations apply to reading and the second three to writing. While the unit of analysis in this case study was not individual teachers but the Grade 1 teachers in the school as a whole, I have recorded the individual responses of teachers to the TORP questions because, as has already emerged in the foregoing analysis, the teachers did display individualised pedagogy despite the fact that they planned their work together.

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This table shows emphatically that all three teachers have a "phonics" and a "whole word" orientation to reading. Emphasis on meaning is very decisively less important to them: in fact they actively disagree with it. In terms of writing (the last three theoretical orientations in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**), the three teachers' responses were generally less consistent, but were clearly more oriented towards presentation than process or form. The emphasis on phonics in reading supports the process orientation in writing. The higher score (showing less preference) for a meaning-centred orientation in reading also supports the higher score for the form orientation in writing. These results are quite consistent with the observations in the classroom, the interviews and the drawings done by the pupils.

Table 7: Teacher's theoretical orientations to teaching reading
 (a score of 1 means "strongly agree" and 5 means "strongly disagree")

Theoretical orientation	Attitude statements	Scores			Total	Average for orientation
		A	G	N		
Reading						
A “phonics” orientation	If a learner doesn’t know a word, tell him to “sound it out.”	1	1	1	3	1
	The most important thing to do to learn a new word is to break it up into its sounds	1	1	1	3	
A whole word/skills orientation	Introduce new words before the learner reads them in a sentence	1	1	1	3	1
	Repeat a new word a number of times so that the learner recognizes it by sight	1	1	1	3	
A “meaning centred “ orientation	Tell the learner to guess the meaning of a new word and carry on reading	5	5	2	12	4.4
	Do not correct the learner if she reads “house” when the written word is “home”	5	5	4	14	
Writing						
A “presentation” orientation	The teacher should correct children’s spellings as they write	1	1	2	4	1.2
	It is important to teach children to write neatly and form letters correctly	1	1	1	3	
A “process” orientation	If a learner’s spelling is logical but not correct, don’t correct the mistake	5	5	4	14	3
	In the early years it is more important for children to be confident writers than accurate writers	1	1	2	4	
A “forms” orientation	Children should write for audiences other than their teacher	5	5	3	13	3.7
	Young writers should choose their own reasons for writing	1	5	3	9	

Table 8 overleaf shows the teacher's responses to the items in the questionnaire relating to teaching activities. A score of 1 indicates strong agreement, and a score of 5 strong disagreement with the statement. As in Table 7 the first three theoretical orientations identified apply to reading, and the second three to writing.

This table shows how the teachers at Mthembu JPS supported practical activities which were inconsistent with their theories about teaching reading. For example although the teachers' declared views on their theoretical beliefs showed that they strongly disagreed with a meaning-oriented approach, they gave meaning-oriented practices the highest ratings in their assessment of useful practices. However, there was a disjuncture between teachers declared and observed practice: as has been shown, observations of their teaching showed little practical evidence of an orientation towards meaning. This finding indicates that while teachers report that they use activities which are in accordance with the meaning orientation espoused by the curriculum, they have not internalised why they should be doing these activities and what they mean theoretically.

Regarding writing, the teacher's responses were slightly more consistent with their declared theoretical positions, also showing a presentation orientation with an emphasis on copying and spelling, rather than process or form. This was consistent with observations in the classrooms. Note again that teachers appeared to have stronger views on the teaching of reading than on the teaching of writing.

The instrument adapted for collecting this data was adapted from Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell, and Wray (2001), who were investigating the beliefs of effective literacy teachers. They found that teachers who were judged to be most effective had more consistent beliefs regarding teaching reading, and these beliefs were consistent with their reported practice. In this case study the instrument was used to triangulate data gathered through other methods regarding how teachers teach reading. In the present study the instrument showed that both individually and severally, teachers did not have consistent beliefs about teaching reading, nor did they consistently believe in practices which exemplified particular frameworks of belief.

The teachers' experiences of teacher training programmes was discussed in the section recounting findings from interviews. They felt underprepared by initial teacher education, continuing teacher development and undersupported by the Department of Education.

Table 8: Teacher's beliefs about useful practice in teaching reading
(a score of 1 means "strongly agree" and 5 means "strongly disagree")

Theoretical orientation	Attitude statements	Scores			Average for orientation
		A	G	N	
Reading					
A “phonics” orientation	Teaching letter sounds to help learners build up new words	1	1	1	1.5
	Learners completing phonic worksheets and exercises	1	1	4	
A “whole word” orientation	Using flash cards to teach learners to read words by sight	1	2	2	1.3
	Reading sentences that use controlled vocabulary (e.g. the cat sat on the mat)	1	1	1	
A “meaning centred “ orientation	Using big books with a group of children to model and share reading	1	1	1	1
	Children reading stories about their experiences that they have dictated to the teacher	1	1	1	
Writing					
A “presentation “ orientation	Learners copying or tracing over an adult’s writing	1	2	1	1.2
	Regular spelling tests	1	1	1	
A “process orientation	When a learner doesn’t know how to spell a word, she writes the first sound and then a line, and carries on writing. (e.g. t_____)	2	1	3	2.3
	Learners commenting on and helping to revise each other’s writing	1	5	2	
A “’forms” orientation	Writing to children in other schools or to their parents	2	5	4	2.8
	Modelling for children how to write in particular forms (e.g. writing letters, reports, lists etc)	1	3	2	

5.4.3 Teacher's own reading habits

Table 9 below shows findings from the questionnaire dealing with the personal reading habits of the teachers. In this table, a score of 1 indicates that the behaviour is practiced every day, and a score of 5 indicates that it is never practiced. Once more the teacher's individual scores are presented here for the sake of developing fuller pictures of the three teachers, but the unit of analysis is the whole group rather than the individual teachers. This table shows that the teachers see themselves as good or at least accurate readers, and they mostly report enjoying reading. They read in relation to courses they are studying and newspapers on an almost daily basis, and do not regularly borrow books from a library. None of the teachers reported reading daily to their own children, and one teacher reported doing this very seldom. Ms N. commented on this in an interview:

N: I like reading but I am too lazy. I don't enjoy it very much. I like watching TV. I have to read to my children, but they don't really see me reading for myself. Maybe I should start to read to my [three year old] son.

This finding offers a significant explanation for the fact that teachers so seldom read stories aloud to classes in this case study. If the teachers did not see reading stories aloud as extremely important for the development of their own children, it is congruent that they did not consider this as vital for the development of children in their classrooms.

One of the roles of reading teachers should be to demonstrate to children how reading is useful to them and to assist in motivating students to read through sharing their own (positive) responses to texts. Given the profiles of teachers' reading habits shown in Table 9 below, it is not surprising that teachers were never observed playing such a motivating, role-modelling role in their classrooms.

5.4.4 Teachers' definitions of "good readers"

In the group interview I asked teachers to identify the characteristics of "good readers". Without hesitation, the teachers defined a good reader as someone who "reads fast". Even when pushed they did not mention understanding meaning in their answers. However, observations of teaching and interviews did not expose any attention to reading speed (fluency) in practice. As detailed in Section 2.4, arguments have been made that in order for

readers to understand what they read they need to read at a minimum rate of a word per second. Teachers in this study showed no awareness of this.

Table 9: The personal reading habits of teachers
 (a score of 1 indicates that the behaviour is practiced every day,
 and a score of 5 indicates that it is never practiced)

My own personal reading habits....	Score			Total	Mean
	A	G	N		
I read for pleasure	2	1	3	6	2.0
I read to find information for a course I am studying	1	1	2	4	1.3
I read newspapers	1	2	2	5	1.7
I read magazines	3	5	2	10	3.3
I buy books	4	3	4	11	3.7
I read (or used to read) stories to my own children	2	2	4	8	2.7
I borrow books from a library	4	3	3	10	3.3
I read English books or other texts in English	1	4	3	8	2.7
I read Zulu Books or other texts in Zulu	5	1	4	10	3.3
I enjoy reading	1	1	3	5	1.7
I am a good reader	Yes	Yes			
I am a slow reader, but I read accurately			Yes		
I read slowly and I make a lot of mistakes					

5.4.5 Conclusion: Beliefs and practice

This section has shown that none of the teachers in this case had clearly defined and consistent beliefs about teaching reading, and neither their reported nor their observed practice was consistent with their beliefs. It has also shown that at the level of belief teachers strongly disagreed with a meaning centred orientation to teaching reading, although the curriculum demands otherwise. Nevertheless they reported supporting activities which would be associated with such a meaning orientation, although these activities were not a key feature of their observed practice. This confusion is likely to be a result of inadequate initial and continuing teacher education in the context of the ongoing influence of the ways in which teachers were themselves taught to read and their own attitudes towards reading. Since existing research suggests that more effective teachers of reading exhibit greater consistency

between their beliefs and practice, lack of such congruence offers a plausible explanation for poor student performance.

5.5 WHAT DO TEXTS DISPLAYED IN CLASSROOMS REVEAL ABOUT TEACHING READING IN THOSE CLASSROOMS?

The foregoing sections of this chapter have demonstrated that the majority of texts displayed in Grade 1 classrooms in this case consisted of single letters and words, or lists of words. This points to the focus of pedagogy on learning the alphabet through association of letters with pictures of objects which begin with common sounds of the letters, and learning to read words out of the context of extended text. While some extended texts were found in the classrooms, the relative paucity of such texts points to the lack of focus in the pedagogy on using text-level features to help uncover meaning of text. Instead, the preponderance of letter- and word-level texts reveals the use of bottom-up methodologies for teaching reading.

The juxtaposition of written words and pictures of the items they represent in many classroom displays points to the assumption that picture cues can assist reading of words. In the context of the limited English language competence of the children in this case, illustrations of written words also point to the teaching emphasis on building vocabulary in English. Extremely few texts in isiZulu were displayed on the walls: this demonstrates the language policy of the school, namely to teach through the medium of English, though it shows a lack of understanding of the stated curriculum policy of additive bilingualism.

The displays of children's own work in this case reveal that accurate copying from the board is valued and that the reading/writing connection is not valued by teachers. The absence of children's writing for meaningful purposes or to express their own ideas and experiences is also instructive.

The shortage of reading books in the classrooms reveals that children are learning to read without reference to the major artefact in the reading process. While the presence of one classroom library, however inadequate, reveals a consciousness on the part of the teacher concerned that reading books is important, it was only through observation that it became

apparent that this was considered appropriate for high achievers but not important for helping the average student learn to read.

5.6 CAN TEXTS DISPLAYED IN A CLASSROOM EFFECTIVELY REVEAL HOW TEACHERS TEACH READING?

Sections 5.3.2 to 5.3.6 described and analysed data relating to texts displayed in the classroom, collected through the transect walk. This was complemented by data collection through classroom observation, interviews and children's drawings (Sections 5.3.7 to 5.3.9) and a questionnaire (Section 5.4). The research question posed relating to the methodology of this study was: *Can the texts displayed in a classroom be used as an effective way of revealing how teachers teach reading?* In other words, what is the extent of the triangulation of findings between methods of data collection and analysis?

The chief finding relating to the texts displayed in the classroom was that letter and word level texts dominated. This suggested that teachers used bottom-up teaching approaches. This finding was corroborated by all other methods of data collection, although the questionnaire on teachers' beliefs and practices showed that teachers' beliefs incorporated emphasis on meaning as well. However, there was a lack of congruence between teacher's beliefs and practice. At a macro level then, the research showed that the texts displayed in a classroom, in particular locally produced texts, can indeed be used to quickly ascertain the teacher's dominant approach to teaching reading in classroom contexts such as in this case. However, nuances within the teaching approach are not readily shown through looking at displayed texts, as the rich descriptions enabled by data collection through observation, interviews and drawings showed.

While findings in this regard relate only to this case study, a fuzzy generalisation can be made: In mainstream South African schools, the texts displayed on Grade 1 classroom walls, in particular the locally made texts, reveal how teachers teach reading in an accurate though not necessarily nuanced way.

The first point to be made is that not all texts displayed in a classroom are necessarily used consciously in the teaching of reading, though they are all part of children's experience and

incidentally contribute to how they understand the purposes and process of reading. Simple observation of displayed texts does not enable distinction between texts displayed for the sake of decoration and those actively used in teaching reading. Particularly in the context of under-resourced schools, such as in this case, teachers may be prepared to put up any poster/text in their classrooms, “to make the room more attractive,” without considering the pedagogical value of such texts. This did not appear to be so in this case as none of the texts displayed on the classroom walls was irrelevant or entirely inappropriate to the content of lessons observed. All the texts displayed in this case, whether commercially produced or locally made could be construed as aids to learning and teaching. However, the locally produced texts give a clearer and more accurate idea of where teachers place their emphasis in teaching reading than commercially produced texts.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented and analysed findings regarding the following research questions:

1. How do the Grade 1 teachers in this case teach reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in this practice?
2. What are the stated beliefs of teachers in this case regarding the teaching of reading? How is reading for meaning positioned in their beliefs?
3. How do teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading relate to their observed and reported practice?
4. What do the texts displayed in classrooms reveal about the teaching of reading in those classrooms?
5. Can the texts displayed in a classroom be used as an effective way of revealing how teachers teach literacy?

I have used the final research question,

6. What does this case study illuminate for consideration in relation to initial and continuing teacher professional development of early reading teachers?

to focus recommendations emanating from this study in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

As a case study, this was an investigation of a singularity bounded by time, space and activity. However, the school in which this case study was conducted could be described as a mainstream school. It has characteristics in common with the majority of other schools in South Africa. It is not an example of the poorest and most disadvantaged schools. Particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, there are many schools which are worse off in terms of the socio-economic circumstances of learners, physical resources, teacher training and commitment, and whole-school focus on learning and teaching. On the other hand, the school is not one of the country's pockets of excellence. It is a typical peri-urban school, and the practices of teachers and learners in the school are likely to also be typical.

The learners at this school are probably similar to roughly half South Africa's school-going population. It was shown in Chapter 3 that, from the early years at school onwards, such students underperform significantly against both national and international benchmarks, especially in relation to activities associated with reading comprehension. There will clearly be spin-offs from these students' present school performance into their livelihoods as adults and ultimately into the economy of the country as a whole. Similarly, the training and practice of the Grade 1 teachers in this case is probably similar to that of a large number of Foundation Phase teachers in the country.

Case study research such as this is intended to provide rich, nuanced description of the singularity it uncovers. However, the detailed description of this case was intended to have wider impact in at least two ways.

First, it focuses academic attention on the early years of schooling. In South Africa, a great deal of research and policy emphasis has been placed on strategies for improving school-leavers' results at the matric level. Ensuring that students become proficient, independent readers is key to matric success. The focus of state policy, resources and action urgently needs to shift to the other end of the schooling spectrum as it is in the early years at schooling that foundations are laid on which further academic endeavour is built. In order to swing the focus of policy around, and to develop effective early grade classroom practice, it is

important to be clear about current practice in Foundation Phase reading classrooms. This case study, conducted in a typical school, contributes to such an understanding.

Second, this case study highlights pedagogy as an explanatory factor in relation to poor reading performance over which teachers have agency. As set out in Chapter 3, existing literature explains the “reading problem” in South Africa largely in terms of socio-economic factors such as health and nutrition; cultural factors such as family child-rearing and literacy practices; and factors internal to the education system, such as access to libraries and textbooks, the curriculum and the practice of learning through the medium of a language other than the home language. Literacy is a multidimensional phenomenon, and I believe that all these factors are of great importance. In particular, the issue of the language of instruction at Foundation Phase level is of utmost significance and, the fact that in this case the language of instruction was not the home language of students had a profound impact on literacy teaching practices. By saying this I am not suggesting that language of instruction per se determines literacy practices. The methods used in teaching reading in isiZulu Home Language are not necessarily any different from those used in teaching reading in English as an additional language (in fact, as my preliminary study showed, quite the opposite is the case). However, all other factors being equal, early literacy development in the Mother Tongue has greater potential to produce fluent and enthusiastic readers.

The literature tends to identify structural causes for poor reading performance, and to address these problems requires structural change and the co-ordination of the entire machinery of government and civil society. This would be a huge and lengthy process. What is missing from the literature in South Africa is a thoroughgoing understanding of factors, such as pedagogy, in relation to which individual teachers have some kind of agency to effect change. The present research aims to deepen understanding of teacher agency in reading instruction in South Africa through the rich description and analysis of how reading is taught in a particular set of Grade 1 classrooms.

In Section 2.4, I considered from a theoretical and research perspective six issues about how children learn to read, and I return to these now in relation to the findings of this study. The first issue related to whether early reading is a maturational or a developmental process. The NCS curriculum sees it as developmental. However this research showed that teachers did not understand the developmental nature of reading, and tended to make absolute distinctions

between readers and non-readers. They described unformed writing as scribbling. They used behaviourist teaching strategies, but did not focus on perceptual identification and matching activities, both of which are associated with maturational views.

The second issue discussed was whether beginning reading and mature reading are similar processes. The teachers in this study proceeded as if beginning reading is different from mature reading, which is consistent with a bottom-up approach to reading. They focused on what they saw as the foundational skill of graphophonic correspondence and assumed that meaning would proceed naturally from the decoding of words. However, teacher's own declarative understanding of good reading was defined by reading speed. It was noted that no evidence was found of teachers paying attention to developing children's reading speed.

The third issue discussed in Section 2.4 was whether reading in a second language is the same as reading in the mother tongue. The perspective was advanced which is contrary to the position argued in the NCS, that while a first language is acquired, a second language has to be taught. Teachers were aware of the need to teach English (L2) vocabulary, and this fundamentally influenced their pedagogy. Research was presented which argues that reading skills learned in one language transfer to another language without having to be re-taught but that a certain level of oral proficiency in L2 is needed before reading skills learned in L1 can be transferred for use in L2. In this case, though more time was allocated to teaching reading in English, teachers approached learning to read English in the same way as they approached learning to read isiZulu, aside from the aspect of translation of vocabulary. Children obviously did not have the oral proficiency in English to make skill transfer between languages effective, and in this case, to use Macdonald's metaphor (1990), children are still swimming up the waterfall.

Fourth was the issue of whether delays in reading can be reversed. Research was presented which argues that it is crucial to deal with delays in reading in the early years at school, and that failure to do so is likely to lead to continued reading problems throughout life. Some examples of interventions which have reportedly made a difference were presented. In this study, no real differentiation of instruction was observed for children who were struggling to read. Indeed, it was not strongly evident that teachers knew which students were struggling, and with what aspects of reading. Teachers wrote the names of children who could not write their own names, but no focused teaching was observed to assist these children to learn to do

it themselves. In one instance “slow” learners were grouped together and given a simpler task than others in the class, but they received no special teaching intervention. Thus while it has been shown that early intervention in reading difficulties can be effective, in this case no such interventions were made and it is likely that delays will remain.

The fifth issue considered was whether children from poor, marginalised and low-literacy communities should be taught to read using a pedagogy which is different from that used with other, more middle-class children. Those who support this view argue against whole-language pedagogy for poor children, and propose an explicit focus on phonics instead. The possibility of a balanced approach being appropriate for all children is not considered, and I argued in Section 2.4 that this is a major weakness in such arguments. The present study offers insight into how some poor and marginalised children from low-literacy backgrounds are currently taught. These children are *already* being taught to read using a bottom-up methodology, with behaviourist whole-class drill of sounds and words, though questions can be asked about how well this is done. Below I outline some of the consequences which I see arising from the almost exclusive use of this strategy.

The sixth issue discussed in Section 2.4 related to debates about how phonics should best be taught. Research and policy around the world supports the explicit teaching of phonics but there is less agreement about whether it should be taught systematically, and despite some well-publicised reports, research does not clearly support either analytic or synthetic phonics over the other. In this case, phonics was taught as the major word-attack strategy, but it was not taught explicitly in that it was not made clear exactly when and how it should be used to read words and how this relates to other types of cues in text. This case highlighted how teachers disregarded the complexities of graphophonic correspondence in English, which could cause potential confusion.

A major conclusion of this research is that meaning is not foregrounded in the teaching of reading in this case. In Chapter 2, I delineated three theoretical perspectives on the reading process which have direct impact on school reading pedagogy. Two of these perspectives are extreme positions, which focus either on the word and sub-word level of text, or on the meaning of the text as a whole. The third theoretical perspective, which is variously understood, seeks compromise, balance or integration between these two extreme positions. The curriculum statement which guided school teaching in South Africa at the time of this

research advocates this “balanced” position, though there are, as I have shown, some contradictions in the way this is expressed and understood. I used these three theoretical perspectives to analyse the data gathered in the case study, and found that irrespective of the curriculum statement, reading was taught in this case through an almost exclusive focus on word- and sub-word features of text, with the assumption that the meaning of text as a whole is the simple sum of the meaning of individual words. In common terminology, reading was taught almost exclusively through an emphasis on phonics and isolated words. I also found that this was not taught systematically or explicitly. For example teachers did not explicitly describe when the strategy of “sounding out” should be used, and exactly what one does when one uses this strategy. Little attention was paid to teaching that the meaning of text is important, or to strategies for accessing this meaning other than use of graphophonic cues.

Teaching children to use phonic cues in reading is important and necessary, but if phonic cues are the only ones they learn how to use, far-reaching problems result.

First, an overemphasis on phonic cues prevents the development of cognitive clarity in relation to reading (in other words it prevents an understanding of what reading is about), and therefore inhibits learning how to read. Reliance on teaching the use of phonic cues to the exclusion of contextual, semantic, syntactic, morphological and linguistic cues contributes to students not developing an understanding that reading is about constructing the meaning of the text on the basis of information contained both within the text and beyond it. On the other hand, effective teaching of reading develops an orientation in children towards reading for meaning. Right from the start, children with an orientation towards meaning appreciate and expect that understanding the meaning of the whole text is the product of the reading process. If the major emphasis of reading lessons is, for example, on the correct pronunciation of words rather than on the meaning of the whole text, then comprehension of text, motivation to read and the ability to read to learn are all compromised. In this case, I found that an orientation towards meaning was not modelled, taught or valued in reading lessons. Instead, I found an almost exclusive emphasis on the use of phonic cues out of the context of whole text. I contend that such a lack of orientation to meaning, particularly in the early years of school, is one of the main causes of poor reading and comprehension among South African school children.

An important way for children to develop an orientation towards meaning, as well as enjoyment and motivation to read, is through observing skilled readers (teachers, in the schooling context) reading stories aloud for enjoyment, reading to find information or for other purposes, talking about what they have read and so on. For children who come from socio-economically marginalised and low literacy backgrounds, demonstrations of skilled reading in school are of particular significance in developing this cognitive clarity. In this case study, the fact that teachers seldom if ever read aloud to children also inhibited the development of cognitive clarity about reading.

A second far reaching effect of the huge focus on letters, sounds and words in this case study relates to its effect on engagement with learning. Children who are engaged and motivated learners are self-confident, understand the need to use a variety of learning strategies in a flexible and appropriate way, are interested in what they are trying to learn and see the activity being learned as pleasurable (P. M. Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002). Engagement with learning to read is undermined at all these levels by a teaching approach which focuses on the whole-class drilling of sounds, letters or words, as was seen in this case study.

A third effect of the way reading is taught in this case is that it does not take into account the multiple ways in which learners learn, or the multiple skill levels of learners in any one class. Whole class recitation, as detailed in this study, might work as a learning methodology for some pupils, but it will not work for others.

In this case there was a paucity of interesting, varied and appropriately levelled texts available for use in reading instruction. Teachers made some use of locally produced stories and versions of Language Experience texts for whole class shared reading, but most of the reading done in this case consisted of lists of words or words with a common spelling pattern used in simple, unconnected sentences. There was a preponderance of what Prinsloo (2005) calls “naming practices.” Little time was allocated for actually reading, and no time was routinely allocated for reading texts not produced for literacy instruction.

In my analysis of the reading of extended texts in this case, I showed that teachers did not scaffold learning with gradual release of responsibility to students. Modelled reading, guided reading and independent reading were seldom practiced and certainly not routinely.

Collaborative or shared reading led either by the teacher or by a pupil was a common feature of lessons involving word, sentences or longer texts.

The end result of the heavy emphasis in this case on reading letters, sounds and single words is that children develop into a particular kind of literate subject – the kind of subject who does not expect to understand what they read and does not have a range of strategies to address this lack of understanding, the kind who does not associate reading with pleasure or interest.

My concern in this study was to see how meaning was situated in reading teaching. In Section 2.3, I considered research regarding six aspects that I consider important for teaching reading for meaning. These were: comprehension instruction, vocabulary and background information, fluency instruction, a literacy rich environment, metalinguistic awareness, and the connection between reading and writing. I briefly return to these aspects now, in relation to the present study, all of which received limited attention in this case.

In Chapter 2, I concluded that there is consensus that comprehension, in the sense of thinking about and responding to what is read, can be taught through explicit modelling and thinking aloud, and that it should happen from early days in schooling. However, comprehension is frustrated by oral language weaknesses, as in the case of learning to read in a second language before proficiency has been reached in this language. In the present case, such oral language weaknesses were very evident, and this may explain why teachers did not model the use of comprehension strategies. A related point was that increasing vocabulary and background knowledge enhances comprehension, but again this is frustrated by reading in a second language. However, as has been noted already, little evidence was seen in this case of the development of background knowledge, even using isiZulu. This research showed how in this case little or no attention was paid to fluency instruction, metalinguistic awareness and the connection between reading and writing, all of which are important to teaching reading for meaning.

A literacy-rich environment is important for developing comprehension, and this case study has recorded and classified texts in the classrooms in detail. A literacy-rich environment stimulates students to participate in language and literacy activities. Reading is done in such a room, and adults respond to what children are trying to do. A range of print materials are

available in such a room. In this case, while teachers made the effort to put up posters and pictures in their classrooms, the amount of reading that happened was limited largely to reading words in lists as has been discussed already.

I tried to understand why reading was taught through an emphasis on letters, sounds and words in this case, as opposed to through a “balanced” approach as advocated in the curriculum documents. I found that although the teachers in this case did not have entirely consistent theoretical understandings about the reading process, the way they taught reading was generally in line with their beliefs about reading. Their beliefs about reading were closest to the “bottom-up” or phonics oriented view of the reading process. I explored whether these beliefs about the teaching of reading were consistent with how teachers had themselves learned to read and with their initial teacher education. Only one of the teachers had detailed recollection of these two processes, but in her case it was clear that she had both learned to read and learned to teach reading using a phonics orientation, which was consistent with her current beliefs about reading and teaching reading. The accounts offered by the other two teachers suggested the same link between the teachers’ own experience and training and their current beliefs and practice, but the nature of the data obtained from them was more tenuous.

In trying to understand why teachers teach the way they do, I also explored the role of continuing teacher education in helping teachers to implement the National Curriculum Statement. Such initiatives took the form of non-formal training workshops organised by the Department of Education and formal academic courses, including courses in Adult Basic Education and Training which are generally associated with teaching literacy to adults. Teachers were dismissive of the relevance of both non-formal and formal courses to the task of teaching Grade 1 children to read, and regarded the curriculum documents themselves as offering them little direction. However, continuing education opportunities should develop in teachers a deeper understanding of both theory and practice in their field and careful analysis of their content and delivery would yield information about why teachers widely regard such courses as ineffective. The perspective, used to analyse data in Chapter 5, that learning should be scaffolded, with a gradual release of responsibility to the learner can usefully be applied in developing teacher education courses.

An important factor in teachers’ focus on word level work in this case was the fact that they were teaching children how to read a language in which they had little oral competence,

through the medium of that language. Teachers felt that they had to build student's English vocabulary, and did this through teaching word lists. The school did not have text books or readers in English for this level of learners, partly as a result of the recent introduction of English as a medium of instruction. However, while the language of instruction was a significant barrier to learning to read it cannot be seen as a key explanation for the bottom-up focus of reading instruction – as detailed above, teachers believed that this was the best way to learn reading.

Having described and analysed reading pedagogy in this case study, recommendations regarding a number of aspects of the study would be possible. However, I have chosen to limit my recommendations to my final research question, namely, “What does this case study illuminate for consideration in relation to initial and continuing teacher professional development of early reading teachers?”

Answering this question requires an understanding of the kinds of generalisations that can be made from the study of a singularity, an ongoing debate in relation to case study research. One way of establishing the kinds of generalisations that can tentatively be made, is to relate the findings of the present study to other published case studies concerned with Grade 1 reading pedagogy in South Africa. As was shown in Chapter 3, very little peer-reviewed case study research has been done regarding reading pedagogy in the Foundation Phase in South Africa, and to my knowledge no research has been done in contexts similar to the school which was the focus of this case study. However, the findings of this research are in line with the two case studies of Grade 1 reading pedagogy described in Chapter 3. Note that although one of these case studies involves the teaching of reading in an African language, findings regarding pedagogy are similar to those in this case. In addition, there are to my knowledge no case studies of Grade 1 reading teaching pedagogy which refute my findings.

Bloch (1996, 2002) outlines common literacy teaching practices in multilingual Foundation Phase classrooms in the Western Cape (ex-House of Assembly and House of Delegates schools, as opposed to ex- Department of Education and Culture as in this case study). She notes:

- Heavily skills-based reading methods continue to dominate, in spite of the curriculum;
- Reading is often taught without reference to books at all;

- Where the medium of instruction is other than the home language, children have to learn the relationship between new and strange sounds and words in their printed form;
- Written work involves copying of letters, words or sentences from the board and does not involve writing for any real purpose;
- Whole-class chanting of the response that the teacher wishes to elicit is common;
- Labelling is regarded as a useful way to get young children to recognise words.

This congruence between Bloch's findings and my own study supports the generalisability of my work.

Muthivhi (2008), in a study of Grade 1 Tshivenda mother-tongue instruction, also reports on the teaching of sounds and words, with an apparent emphasis on being able to verbalise words correctly, extensive naming practice, extensive rote learning, lack of explicit teaching and lack of subject knowledge and conceptual emphasis. Prinsloo's conclusion (2005) that school children come to learn that reading and writing is about recitation, chanting, drilling and other list-learning, is also supported by this case study.

This research also supports the findings of non-case study research by Ramarumo (1996), Pretorius and Machet (2004), Ntuli and Pretorius (2005), Sailors, Hoffman and Matthee (2007), and Dixon, Place and Kholowa (2008), and work in the Bernsteinian tradition by Hoadley (2007, 2008) and Hoadley and Ensor (2009).

Further studies in contexts similar to the present study would need to be conducted in order to establish fully the extent to which the findings are generalisable. However, on the basis of my work observing lessons as a teacher educator in KwaZulu-Natal schools, and on the basis of the preliminary study reported in Chapter 1 of this thesis, and on the basis of other empirical studies of Foundation Phase classrooms, I am confident that it is possible to make recommendations for teacher education on the basis of the findings of this research.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

It is recommended that both initial and continuing teacher education for Foundation Phase teachers should:

1. Devote increased time and attention to understanding the reading process and developing pedagogical content knowledge regarding teaching reading through teaching modules which are dedicated to the teaching of reading and writing.
2. Emphasise the cognitive and pedagogical reasons why children should learn to read their home language first and only begin reading a second language when that language is orally well established.
3. Ensure that teachers themselves know about and can use a variety of reading strategies over and above “sounding out” to understand text and ensure that teachers learn to teach these strategies explicitly.
4. Help student teachers to develop a coherent understanding of balanced or integrated reading teaching from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. In so doing it is important to recognise the strength of teachers’ own experience in determining their views about how reading should be taught. Teacher education programmes should explicitly demonstrate that reading does not proceed simply from the bottom up, and should regularly reinforce this. In addition, appropriate balanced reading pedagogy should be modelled and practiced in teacher training.
5. Expose student teachers to children’s literature in a formal and structured way, in order to familiarise them with the language and conventions of these books, to draw their attention to the linguistic and cognitive benefits of exposure to these books, and to show them how storybooks can be used to teach reading (and many other things too). Access to books is not enough; teachers need to be shown what to do with these books.
6. Teach teachers why it is important to regularly read aloud to children, and require them to practice finding suitable books and reading them aloud in their teacher development classes.
7. Demonstrate “thinking aloud” about reading to teachers and require them to practice doing the same.

8. Teach teachers about the concept of scaffolding of learning and the gradual release of responsibility to learners. They should learn how to use modelled reading, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading in a balanced reading programme.
9. Scaffold the learning of teachers in teacher education programmes through modelling and shared and guided practice of the strategies they are being taught. Useful ways of doing this could be through the use of videos of good classroom practice, followed by guided practice and critical reflection on this by student teachers.
10. Reading assessment should be an integral part of teacher training. The almost total disregard of reading assessment in the Foundation Phase points to a lack of understanding and knowledge by teachers as to how to assess different components of reading and how to link results to differentiated instruction.

6.2 CONCLUSION: THE WRITING ON THE WALL

A key element of this research involved using the texts displayed on the walls of classrooms in this case to elucidate how reading was taught. The writing is on the wall in three important senses.

At the most literal level, this research showed that children's most common encounters with text in this case were with lists of isolated words written on the chalkboard. Learners in this case were not exposed to real and extended text to any significant extent during the first year of schooling. This is likely to be a generalisable finding in mainstream schools in South Africa, given resource availability and teacher history and training. During this formative phase of schooling, when children develop a sense of what reading is about, the texts they are exposed to play a major role in preventing them from coming to an early understanding of the functions of reading, from developing multiple strategies for text comprehension and from enjoying their experiences of reading. They do not have enough opportunity to learn to read by reading.

The writing is also on the wall in the sense of a metaphorical warning. We can expect the Grade 1 children in this case to perform poorly in reading at all levels because they do not develop a good grounding in the fundamentals of reading for meaning from the early years at

school and have not been prepared to read and comprehend extended text, which is the core business of schooling. The pedagogy of reading in this case does not release responsibility to learners so that they can become more independent readers, but rather locks children into continued dependence on teachers as they read. Learners are not taught to monitor for meaning as they read, and are only taught phonic strategies to access unknown words. This is neither efficient nor sufficient for reading for meaning in English. General knowledge about the world is not developed to a significant extent, and thus learners' schemata, used for accessing meaning when reading, are not developed sufficiently.

Third, to return to the opening statements in this dissertation regarding the importance of literacy in reaching the Millennium Development Goals, the goal of quality schooling for all will not be reached in South Africa while insufficient and inappropriate attention is paid to literacy teaching in the early years. This will have a domino effect on all spheres of South African life and could conceivably see the re-emergence of struggles in the education sphere which could present a serious challenge to the emerging democratic state. Paying attention to literacy teaching means ensuring that Foundation Phase teachers are fully trained, supported and resourced to teach reading for meaning.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: UKZN Ethical Clearance Certificate

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL : ximbap@ukzn.ac.za



7 MARCH 2007

MS. C VERBEEK (892221919)
ADULT & HIGHER EDUCATION

Dear Ms. Verbeek

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0068/07M

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"Reading the writing on the walls: Teaching reading in grade 1 classrooms in a Pietermaritzburg School"

Yours faithfully


MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Ms. S Land)

2007-03-09

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

APPENDIX 2: Informed Consent Documentation (English)

DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT OF TEACHERS
RESEARCH ON TEACHING OF READING IN GRADE 1 CLASSROOMS

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature of the research project, and I agree to participate in the research project. I understand that in this project photographs will be taken of materials in my classroom, and that these photographs will be used for research processes. I accept the assurances of the researcher that no harmful or disrespectful use will be made of any photographs taken.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, if I want to.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

...

NOTE:

You should be given time to read, understand and question the information given before giving consent. This should include time out of the presence of the investigator and time to consult friends and/or family.

**INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH ON
TEACHING OF READING IN GRADE 1 CLASSROOMS**

Aims of research

- To document how reading is taught in a sample of Grade 1 classrooms in KwaZulu-Natal.
- To find out why teachers teach reading in this way.

Who is doing the research?

Clare Verbeek (B.A., H.D.E, B.Ed., CELTA)
Lecturer, School of Education and Development
Room 73, Education Building
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Corner Golf and Ridge Roads
Pietermaritzburg
Tel: 033 2606121 / 0729698478
verbeekc@ukzn.ac.za

Research Supervisor who may be contacted for further information

Sandra Land
Room 9, Education Building
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Pietermaritzburg
Tel: 033 2605497
land@ukzn.ac.za

How you were identified to take part in this research

All the Grade 1 teachers at your school are taking part in this research. The research is being done at your school because of the ongoing relationship which the researcher has with the school and with the Grade 1 teachers in particular.

What does this research require of you?

- The researcher will **observe you teaching** on three days for approximately 3 hours on each day. The purpose of these observations will be to see what you actually do when you teach children to read (Note, you do not have to do any special preparation for this).
- The researcher will **interview you in detail** about what you do when you teach children to read (this will take approximately 1 ½ hours after school after each observation). The interviews will be tape-recorded to ensure accurate transcription.
- The researcher will take **photographs** of reading materials in your classroom and you will explain how you use the materials.
- You will **fill in a questionnaire** about your beliefs about teaching reading (this will take approximately 30 minutes after school hours)
- You will take part in one 2-hour **group discussion** at your school after school hours to talk about the teaching of reading at your school

When will the research happen?

The research will take place at times which are negotiated with you and agreed on by your school principal.

How will you benefit from being involved in this research?

You will not benefit financially from being involved in this research. However, you as an individual and your colleagues as a team of grade 1 teachers will individually and collectively clarify what you consider important when you teach reading, and this could possibly lead to greater awareness of your role as a reading teacher and of effective teaching practices.

What risks are involved?

None of these activities should cause you any discomfort or anxiety or danger! The teaching observations are not inspections! You are not expected to do anything you do not normally do in your teaching. The information you provide will not be used against you in any way.

How will the information you give be used?

The information you give will be analysed and used in the researcher's M.Ed. thesis. This thesis will eventually be placed in the University library. It is possible also that other articles or presentations will be written about this research. You and your school will not be identified at all in anything which is written. Audio recordings and photographs made during the research will not be used in any written text or in any presentations without your prior permission.

The completed questionnaires, any recordings and any other information you give for this research will be stored in a locked cabinet in an office at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for a minimum period of 2 years.

Will you remain anonymous?

Your identity will not be revealed in this research. You will be referred to by a pseudonym (false name). Your school will also be referred to by a pseudonym.

What will happen if you withdraw from the research?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You can decide not to participate at any stage and for any reason, and this will have no negative results for you.

Child Assent form (English)

I, _____

understand that my parents or guardian have given permission (said it is OK) for me to take part in a project about teaching literacy at [REDACTED] I understand that my drawings will be used in this research, and I am happy for them to be put in a book or shown to other people. I believe the researcher when she says she will not use my drawings to make me look silly.

I am taking part because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at any time I want to and nothing will happen to me if I want to stop.

Signature of Child

Signature of Parent/ Guardian

Date

Witness (other than Investigator)

Date

NOTE:

Parents, Legal guardians or legally authorised official must sign the consent form permitting minors to participate in research projects. An Informed Consent document for minors must be completed by the child's parent/guardian

Parent/Guardian consent form (English)

I _____ (full names of parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of the information provided below, and the nature of the research project, and I consent to the involvement of my child _____ (full name of child) in the research project. I understand that my child's drawings may be used in the research project, and give permission for the drawings to be published. I accept the assurances of the research team that no harmful or disrespectful use will be made of these drawings.

I know that my child is free to stop participating in the research at any stage.

NAME OF PARENT/ GUARDIAN (In capital letters):.....

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/ GUARDIAN:

DATE:

NOTE:

Parents and guardians should be given time to read, understand and question the information given before giving consent. This should include time out of the presence of the investigator and time to consult friends and/or family.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS FOR RESEARCH ON TEACHING OF READING IN GRADE 1 CLASSROOMS

Aims of research

- To document how reading is taught in a sample of Grade 1 classrooms in KwaZulu-Natal.
- To find out why teachers teach reading in this way.

Who is doing the research?

Clare Verbeek (B.A., H.D.E, B.Ed., CELTA)
Lecturer, School of Education and Development
Room 73, Education Building
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Corner Golf and Ridge Roads
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verbeekc@ukzn.ac.za

Research Supervisor who may be contacted for further information

Sandra Land
Room 9, Education Building
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Pietermaritzburg
Tel: 033 2605497
land@ukzn.ac.za

How your child was identified to take part in this research

All the Grade 1 teachers at your child's school are taking part in this research. The research is about what the teachers do when they teach reading. Your child was identified to participate in the research because he/she is in Grade 1 at the school.

What does this research require of your child?

Your child will draw a picture of his/her literacy class, and this picture will be given to the researcher. The researcher might ask your child to talk about what he/she has drawn. Your child's picture might be used in the researcher's report.

When will the research happen?

The research will take place at times which are negotiated with the teacher and school principal.

How will your child benefit from being involved in this research?

Neither your child nor his/her teacher will benefit financially from being involved in this research. It is possible that the teacher will become more aware of effective teaching practices, and that this will benefit your child.

What risks are involved?

Your child will not be asked to do anything that causes any discomfort or anxiety or danger! The information (pictures) he/she provides will not be used against him/her in any way.

How will the researcher use the information your child gives?

Children's drawings provided in this research will be analysed and used in the researcher's M.Ed. thesis. The drawings will provide information about how the students experience their literacy classes. This thesis will eventually be placed in the University library. It is possible also that other articles or presentations will be written about this research. The school, the teachers and the students will not be named in anything which is written about this research.

Your child's drawing will be stored in a locked cabinet in an office at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for a minimum period of 2 years.

Will your child remain anonymous?

Your child's identity will not be revealed in this research. He/she will be referred to by a false name if necessary.

What will happen if your child withdraws from the research?

Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. He/she can decide not to participate at any stage and for any reason, and this will have no negative results.

APPENDIX 3: Guidelines for Transect Walk

As you know, I have never taught in the Foundation Phase. I am interested to learn what you do when you teach children to read in Grade 1. Thank you for helping me to learn about this. One way that I can find out how you teach reading is for you to tell me about the things children in your class read and how you teach them to read those things. I see a lot of posters (with writing and without writing) on the classroom wall. These are things that your learners can look at and read every day, so let's start with those.

Let us walk around your classroom, starting at any point you choose. As we go round, please tell me about all the writing on your classroom walls. I want to hear about each and every thing on your classroom walls. Please tell me how you use each text when you teach.

I will take a photograph of each item so we can talk about them next time we meet, and I will take some notes in this book to remind myself about what you say. If you are OK with it, I will also use this tape recorder to tape what our conversation.

Probes:

- What is the purpose of this particular text?
- Please explain how you use the text in your Literacy lessons
- At what stage of the year would you use this text?
- How would the children be grouped when you are using this text?
- What do the children normally do when you are teaching using this text?
- To maintain children's interest, how often would you recommend changing or introducing new material on the walls?
- In what way do you think the physical appearance of your classroom demonstrates to your students that reading and writing are pleasurable experiences? That we read and write for specific purposes?
- What physical evidence in your classroom connects literacy with daily life outside the classroom?
- Have you heard the term "literacy rich classroom environment"? What does this mean to you?

APPENDIX 4: Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

The aim of this questionnaire is to find out information about the teaching and learning of reading in Grade 1 classrooms at your school.

Please answer all the questions. There are no right or wrong answers because each teacher's practices and beliefs about teaching reading will be different.

All your answers will remain confidential.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Clare Verbeek

School of Education and Development

University of KwaZulu-Natal

P Bag X01

Scottsville 3209

Tel: 033-260 6121(w)

verbeekc@ukzn.ac.za

Part 1: Background information about you

Age range (tick one box)

20-29 years	
30-39 years	
40-49 years	
50 or older	

How long have you been a teacher?

1-5 years	
6-10 years	
11-15 years	
16-20 years	

How long have you been teaching Grade 1?

1-5 years	
6-10 years	
11-15 years	
16-20 years	
20 or more years	

What qualifications do you presently hold?

	Institution	Year
Matric certificate		
Teacher training certificate (2 years)		
Teacher training certificate (3 years)		
University degree		
Post-graduate degree		
Post graduate teacher's diploma		
ACE		
Other (give details)		

How many times have you attended courses or workshops about the teaching of reading or literacy in the last 3 years?

none	
1-5 times	
6-10 times	
More than 10 times	

Part 2: Your own reading habits

Below are 10 statements about your own reading habits. Please indicate **how often** you use these strategies by placing a tick (✓) in the appropriate column.

My own personal reading habits....	Every day	One or two times a week	Once a month	Hardly ever	Never
1. I read for pleasure					
2. I read to find information for a course I am studying					
3. I read newspapers					
4. I read magazines					
5. I buy books					
6. I read stories to my own children (or when they were young, I used to)					
7. I borrow books from a library					
8. I read English books or other texts in English					
9. I read Zulu Books or other texts in Zulu					
10. I enjoy reading					

How do you rate yourself as a reader? (Please write the number in the box)

- 1) I am a good reader
- 2) I am a slow reader, but I read accurately
- 3) I read slowly and I make a lot of mistakes

Part 3: Your feelings about the teaching of literacy

Please read each statement and tick the box which best expresses your feelings about each statement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
If a learner doesn't know a word, tell him to "sound it out"					
Introduce new words before the learner reads them in a sentence					
In the early years it is more important for children to be confident writers than accurate writers					
Tell the learner to guess the meaning of a new word and carry on reading					
The most important thing to do to read a new word is to break it up into its sounds					
Children should write for audiences other than their teacher					
Repeat a new word a number of times so that the learner recognises it by sight					
Do not correct the learner if she reads "house" when the written word is "home"					
The teacher should correct children's spelling as they write					
If a learner's spelling is logical but not correct, don't correct the mistake					
It is important to teach children to write neatly and form letters correctly					
Young writers should choose their own reasons for writing					

Useful teaching activities

How useful do you think each of the following teaching activities is in teaching reading and/or writing? Please tick the box which matches your view.

	Very useful	Useful	Not sure	Not very useful	Not at all useful
Teaching letter sounds to help learners build up new words					
Learners copying or tracing over an adult's writing					
When a learner doesn't know how to spell a word, she writes the first sound and then a line, and carries on writing. (eg t_____)					
Using flash cards to teach learners to read words by sight					
Using big books with a group of children to model and share reading					
Learners completing phonic worksheets and exercises					
Learners commenting on and helping to revise each other's writing					
Regular spelling tests					
Reading sentences that use controlled vocabulary (eg the cat sat on the mat)					
Children reading stories about their experiences that they have dictated to the teacher					
Writing to children in other schools or to their parents					
Modelling for children how to write in particular forms (eg writing letters, reports, lists etc)					

What do learners need to know?

What do you think are the three most important things children need to learn when they first encounter reading?

What do you think are the three most important things children need to learn when they first encounter writing?

APPENDIX 5: Checklist for Classroom Observations 3, 4 & 5

1. Amount of print experience

- Record amount of print in the classroom
- Count number of library books (do not include books that are off –limits to children)
- Record print on classroom surfaces (and the extent to which teachers or learners refer to this)
- Amount of time that print is involved in classroom activities, including the centrality of print to the activities and the extent to which the activities are cross-curricular rate centrality from 1-5
- Categorise print that is directed at students, what is semi-permanent in nature –i.e. not blackboard notes, level of text, origin of text,

2. Type of print experienced

- Experience with reading and writing extended texts
- Extended, phrasal/sentential, word, letter/diagraph?

3. Nature of print experience: Student agency with print

- Amount of time students have a choice about what they are reading
- Extent of authorial control in writing (single correct answer, one correct response)
- Student authored texts read aloud to class/displayed
- Opportunities to write for audiences beyond the teacher

4. Type of classroom activities

- configuration of lesson/part of lesson (small group/ whole class)
- major focus of lesson (handwriting/ listening,/speaking/ reading/ writing/ spelling)
- specific foci of reading activities (reading connected text/ comprehension skills/ comprehension strategies/ focus on lower level meaning/ focus on higher level meaning/ sight words/ phonics: letter-sound, syllables, blends/ letter recognition strategies/ spelling/ writing)
- What material is used? (library book/ text book/ worksheet/ student writing/ language experience chart/ board)
- What does the teacher do? (model/ scaffold/ mark/ tell or give information/ lead discussion/ recitation/ assessment)
- What do learners do? (read/ recite/ copy/ write/ listen/ discuss)

APPENDIX 6: Guidelines for Teacher Interviews after Classroom Observation

1. What would you say was the main content of the lesson in terms of literacy?
 - What were you aiming to teach the children?
 - What would you like them to have learned from the lesson.
2. Why did you choose to teach that particular content now?
 - Why did you plan this lesson for today?
 - How does this lesson fit in with your current work on literacy with this class?
 - How does it fit in with what you think your learners know already and need to know?
3. How have you prepared the class for this lesson content?
 - Have you done any other lessons involving this literacy content?
 - What made you think the children were ready for this content today?
4. Pick up on and explore particular methods of teaching seen in the class – why chose those methods?
5. Was the literacy content different for different children? If so, how?
 - Do you want all the children to learn the same things?
 - Why did you/did you not have different aims for different children?
6. How will you follow up this lesson?
 - Will you revisit this literacy content?
 - How will you approach it?
 - How will you know when to move on?
7. **Additions for specific interviews:**

Interview 1: Discuss the teacher's responses to the questionnaire. "Your questionnaire suggests that your approach to reading emphasises..... and, Have I correctly interpreted your perspective? Ask any relevant questions of clarification.

Interview 2: Talk about planning of lessons and how they do it.

Interview 3: Talk about assessment of learners and how they do it.

APPENDIX 7: Guidelines for Group Interview

I asked you to be part of this discussion because you both said that you had studied ABET. I was wondering in what way this assists you in teaching Grade 1 children.

1. Just for background, please tell me why you registered for an Adult Basic Education course. In this qualification, what do you remember learning about teaching reading or literacy?
2. In what way did this qualification influence your practice in the classroom now? What do you do differently in your school teaching as a result of this qualification?
3. Since we are talking about training, what in-service training have you had about reading /literacy?
 - What do you remember about this?
 - How has your practice changed as a result of this?
4. I would also like to find out about your own experience of learning to read. What do you remember about learning to read?
5. Now please compare how you yourself learned to read with how you teach children to read now. What are the main similarities? What are the differences? How do you explain doing these things differently?
6. Finally, how would you describe a “good reader”? What does a good reader do?

APPENDIX 8: Guidelines for Interview of Principal and HOD (FP)

Once again, thank you for allowing me to work in your school.

As you are aware, I am trying to find out how reading is taught in Grade 1 at this school. I have been observing the work your Grade 1 teachers do, and the teachers have shared their views with me in different ways. I have asked you for this meeting so that I can put their work in wider perspective.

1. Please tell me about the school's history.
2. How many pupils are currently enrolled? What can you say about their backgrounds?
3. Could you explain how the school finances work? What are the school fees, what subsidy do you get? Are you in charge of your own finances or are you a Section 21 school?
4. What is the language policy at this school?
5. What do you personally think about teaching through the medium of English when the children speak isiZulu at home?
6. As academic leaders in the school, what challenges do you face in teaching children to read and write? (pick up on teaching and learning materials here)

APPENDIX 9: Process for Participatory Analysis of Data

Thank you for showing me your classroom last week I learned a lot from you about how you teach literacy. Today I want to ask you to help me to understand better how you use the materials in your classroom, and you can use the photos I took to help you explain. Here are the photos I took of the materials in your classroom.

1. Please group these photos together in **any way you like**. Why did you group them in this way? Group the photos in another way. Why did you group them in this way?
2. What are the **most important** materials for teaching reading? From the photographs choose the pictures that show the most important materials for children in Grade 1. Please put the pictures you have chosen in order of importance. If you do not have a picture of something that you think is very important, make a card to represent it.
3. At different stages of the year teachers use different kinds of texts. Please arrange the pictures on a **time-line** of the year to show me which you use at the beginning of the year, which you use in each term, which ones you would use all through the year. Can you also show me what you would expect a child to be able to read at the end of the year?
4. What **learner groupings** would you use these materials with? Please sort the pictures again in terms of the sorts of learner groupings you use the materials with. What headings would you give to each group?
5. What kinds of materials do learners in your class **use/refer to most** often? Please sort the pictures out into three piles, often, sometimes, seldom/never
6. What kinds of reading activities do learners **enjoy** the most? Please choose the pictures which show the ones they enjoy the most. If there is not a picture for the activity you want to show, please make a card to represent it.
7. Have you ever heard the term “print rich environment” or “literacy rich environment” What does this term mean to you? If you have heard about it, please tell me where you heard about it (training course, department, reading).

APPENDIX 10: Inventory of Text Types from TEX-IN3

(Source: Hoffman, 2002)

1. **Computers/electronic texts:** This category includes any texts that are accessed and used through an electronic medium. Examples: Messaging systems (e-mail), Internet access (for research), software programs (reading and authoring programs), tests or test preparation, text files that are saved and accessed by students, books-on-tape (e.g., listening centres), and news or information shows.
2. **Extended text process charts:** These are multisentence, connected texts that are procedural and guide students toward the use of a particular process or strategy. Some of them may be ongoing. Examples: KWL charts, language charts, inquiry charts, writing process charts, math strategies or algorithms, rubrics.
3. **Games/puzzles/manipulatives:** These are instructional materials designed for student use (often as independent or small group work). To be considered in this category they must feature text prominently. Examples: bingo, Clue, word sorts, magnetic poetry.
4. **Instructional aids:** Often these charts are used as a visual aid to support direct instruction or mini-lessons. They may remain displayed in the classroom after a lesson and be used as an artefact for that lesson or as a reference point for students (e.g., a colour chart). Instructional Aid Charts focus on content while Process Charts focus on process. Examples: Poems for reading together, morning message, labels, vocabulary lists, Daily Oral Language (DOL) chart.
5. **Journals:** Journals must be "local" texts created by the students (individuals or groups working together) based primarily on their work and writing. Examples: Personal journals, literature response logs, content inquiry logs (math, science, and social studies), draft writing.
6. **Levelled books:** These texts are created explicitly for instruction in reading and are levelled for difficulty and accessibility. Examples: Basal anthologies, basal readers, "little books," decodable books.
7. **Limited text process charts:** This category includes letter/word level texts that are procedural and guide the students in the use of a particular strategy or set of strategies. These are similar to the Extended Text Charts in purpose and design; however, they tend to focus at the letter or word level. Examples: Word Walls, alphabet charts, spelling "demon" charts.
8. **Organizational/management charts:** These displays are used to manage or organise the social, academic, or curricular work within the classroom. Examples: Student-helpers chart, workboards, class rules, and local or state curricular objectives, a chart for multiplication facts mastered by students, a skill mastery chart, a record of number of books read.

9. **Portfolios:** Student portfolios are locations for and an organiser for the work completed by students. Consider when looking at portfolios the range of texts collected, the processes of collecting texts, the access and use of these texts, and issues of control over these texts (e.g., what gets in, how, when).
10. **Reference materials:** These are materials that are used as resources for finding information (e.g., word spellings, locations, how to do something). Examples: Atlas, dictionary, encyclopaedia, English grammar handbook, thesaurus, globe, maps.
11. **Serials:** This text type includes a variety of locally and imported materials. Consideration of these texts should focus on qualities of topical relevance, accessibility for the students, quality of the publication, and the number of copies available (Is there one for every student? Is it promoted as a reference or on display?). Examples: Ranger Rick, Highlights, Scholastic newspapers, classroom newspapers, school and community newsletters.
12. **Social/personal/inspirational text displays:** These might include inspirational posters about reading, student of the week displays, current events bulletin boards, etc. Examples: "Star of the Week" posters, "Read, Read, Read" posters.
13. **Student/teacher published work:** This category consists of locally authored (by a student, a teacher, or a combination of the two) books or publications and are on display for students to use. These texts tend to be more permanent than Work Product Displays. Examples: Text innovations with big books, individual-student-authored books, reports/inquiry projects.
14. **Textbooks:** These are student texts that are typically identified with a subject/ content area. Textbooks in this category have a clear instructional design for the teacher to use and the students to follow in learning new concepts and skills. Basal readers are not included in this category. Examples: mathematics textbooks, science textbooks, English grammar books.
15. **Trade-books:** These books do not have an obvious instructional design; they are often called "library books" or "children's" literature." Examples: Picture books and chapter books, narrative, expository, procedural.
16. **Work product displays:** These are displays of teacher or student work that is being "celebrated" and set forward for others to read and enjoy. Examples: model writing samples.
17. **Writing on paper:** These texts involve a written response on paper. These responses vary across a wide continuum, ranging from tightly constrained text response formats to entirely open-ended response/writing formats. Creative writing activities to literature responses to math problem solving exercises. Workbooks are also included in this category. Examples: reading, math, phonics, and spelling workbooks/worksheets; blank paper with assigned topics to write from; paper for creative writing.

APPENDIX 11: Rubric for Holistic Text Environment from the TEX-IN3 Inventory

(Source: Hoffman, 2002)

Extremely rich	The text environment is an extremely rich resource for students. The quantity of texts available and range of text types are extensive. Obvious care has been given to the careful selection of texts that fit the range of students' diverse needs and interests. The texts represent a wide range of cultural perspectives and include languages other than English. These texts link in obvious ways to the curriculum not only in reading and the language arts, but also across the content areas. Local texts are plentiful in the classroom at both the personal and the public levels. The texts reflect uses of literacy that are functional to the daily life in the classroom.
Rich	The text environment provides a rich resource for the vast majority of students. The quantity and range of texts is more than adequate for the needs of the class. There are texts that represent various cultures and might include languages other than English to meet the range of diverse needs of students. The text environment may be exceptional in some areas (e.g., the range and number of tradebook literature available for the students) and is only adequate in others (e.g., the availability and display of expository texts). Local texts are clearly valued in this classroom although commercial texts are more apparent. Student input into the creation of the text environment is clearly evidenced (e.g., student-authored texts, displays, charts).
Functional	The text environment is functional as a resource for most students. The supply is adequate and the range of texts, though limited, is present. The texts show little evidence of cultural or linguistic diversity. Commercial texts dominate. Narrative texts dominate in the trade literature available. Some expository texts are available but the number, appropriateness, and quality are limited. The texts in the classroom may appear organised, but there is little sense of an underlying design for the text environment that will be engaging for and used by the students. There is some evidence of student involvement in the creation of the text environment.
Limited	The text environment is limited. Texts are available; however, they tend to be of mediocre quality and are directed toward the on-grade level reader in the class. Few texts are available that meet the needs of the struggling or highly skilled readers. Commercial texts dominate in the classroom. The collection suggests whole class use of texts with small text sets or individual titles limited. Local texts may be available but are of poor quality and do not appear accessible or functional. Little apparent attention has been given to the display or the organization of the texts in the classroom. Student input into the text environment is limited to Work Product Displays.
Inadequate	The text environment is severely limited and cannot be regarded as a meaningful resource for the vast majority of children. Few, if any, local texts are present. Even the few commercial texts available tend to be of low quality. Restrictive worksheets and workbooks characterise the personal texts available for student use. There is little evidence of student input into the text environment.

APPENDIX 12: TEX-IN3 Holistic Rating for Teacher Interview

(Source: Hoffman, 2002)

Elaborated / enriched	The teacher demonstrates a rich understanding of almost all the texts and how they are used in the classroom. The teacher values and uses these texts regularly as part of teaching. The teacher expresses critical insight into the qualities of the texts in the classroom environment. There is a sense of pride and ownership, in particular, of the local texts that are part of the classroom environment. Even when texts are not valued personally, the criticisms are thoughtful and reveal insight into text qualities (e.g., "worksheets are tedious.") The teacher has shown considerable personal initiative in creating a rich text environment.
Good understanding	The teacher understands and values the wide range of available texts. He/she describes the texts in terms that are accurate at the procedural level but also reveal a deeper understanding of purpose and their potential to impact literacy. Text use is primarily controlled and dictated by the teacher, but there is some evidence of personal choice in text use. A teacher might achieve this rating even though the text environment itself may be somewhat limited as a resource system. This teacher might express concerns over certain limitations in the current text environment and be working toward enhancing its quality. Personal initiative is clearly evidenced. Local texts are valued and used in the classroom.
Basic understanding	The teacher demonstrates a basic understanding of the range of texts in the classroom, how they are used, and why. The teacher uses these texts in purposeful ways. Teacher decisions usually control how the texts are used within the classroom. The teacher values the texts but still operates within a fairly limited conception of reading and literacy purposes of the texts in relation to learning goals or outcomes. The teacher expresses satisfaction with the text environment and is not actively seeking to expand the text resources in his or her classroom.
Vague awareness	The teacher demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of the most basic texts in the classroom. The teacher has a limited sense of the purpose of local texts. The understandings of the commercial texts are limited to procedural descriptions of how the texts can be used and even these descriptions fall short in terms of revealing an understanding of text functions. There is a very limited relationship between instructional goals and the uses of particular texts. The teacher may be aware of the limitations of the texts in the classroom but has not showed a great deal of initiative in bringing other texts into the room.
No knowledge	The teacher demonstrates no knowledge or very limited knowledge of even the most basic commercial texts and how they might work in the classroom. The bulk of the texts in the room are not part of any purpose or plan for use by anyone with any frequency or purpose. The teacher has done little to enrich the text environment beyond what has been provided by the school. The teacher shows no apparent awareness that the text environment is very limited.

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